OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™

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THE BIG REVIEW
THE GEM-LOVING EXPLORER IS BACK IN A BRAND NEW DS ADVENTURE AND IT'S GREAT



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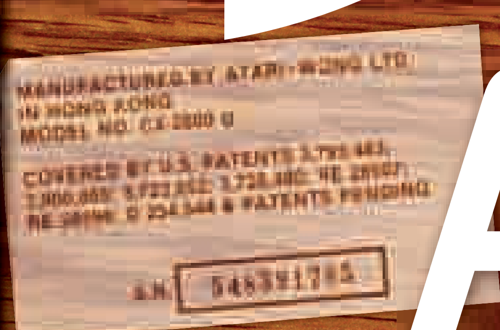
THE BIG FEATURE!
LEGENDS SPEAK
THE TOP CODERS BLOW THE LID OFF WORKING AT ATARI

RETROINSPECTION
VIC-20
THE LITTLE COMMODORE COMPUTER THAT COULD

HUGE EXCLUSIVE!
CHASE HQ II
ONLY ONE COPY EXISTS ON THE GX4000 AND WE'VE PLAYED IT!

BARGAIN HUNT
EVERY GAMES MACHINE LISTED
WANT TO START COLLECTING VINTAGE HARDWARE? CHECK OUT OUR COMPLETE LISTING





ATARI

JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE THE GREATEST 2600 GAMES OF ALL TIME

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

TRIP HAWKINS
THE FOUNDER OF ELECTRONIC ARTS LOOKS BACK AT ITS LAST 25 YEARS

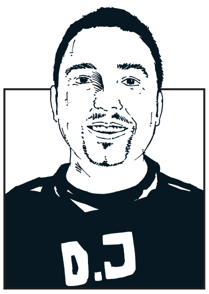
RICK DANGEROUS
THE CORE DESIGN ADVENTURER WHO HELPED PAVE THE WAY FOR LARA CROFT

EXPRESS RAIDER
LOOKING AT HOW THE HIT COIN-OP FARED ON THE 8-BIT COMPUTERS

CONTRA 4
KONAMI SCORES A DIRECT HIT WITH ITS LATEST BLASTER

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE ATARI 2600 GAME



DARRAN JONES

It has got to be *River Raid*. Like many of Activision's 2600 games, it's technically astounding and plays brilliantly. Plus it's a shmup and I love shmups.
Expertise: Loving retro games by day and high-definition movies by night
Currently playing:
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



MARTYN CARROLL

For me it has to be either *H.E.R.O.* or *Pitfall II*. Activision's 2600 stuff was generally excellent, but these two underground epics hit new heights – or should that be plumbed new depths?
Expertise: Micros with insufficient memory
Currently playing:
Peggle
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



STUART HUNT

For sheer hilarity it has to be *Karate*, for sheer brilliance *Yars' Revenge*, for sheer turdism *Last Battle*… no wait, pit plus broken phone equals *ET*, yes *ET*!
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Geometry Wars
Favourite game of all time:
Geometry Wars



ANDREW FISHER

The homebrew conversion of *Thrust* is brilliantly put together, and is well worth a play.
Expertise: More than 20 years of playing Commodore 64 games
Currently playing:
Metroid Prime Hunters
Favourite game of all time:
Wizball



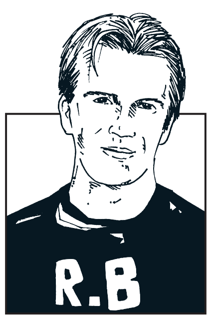
PAUL DRURY

Combat – deviously ricocheting a bullet into your opponent's tank, giving you victory by a single kill as the scores flash, has to be one of gaming's greatest pleasures.
Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Super Mario Galaxy
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

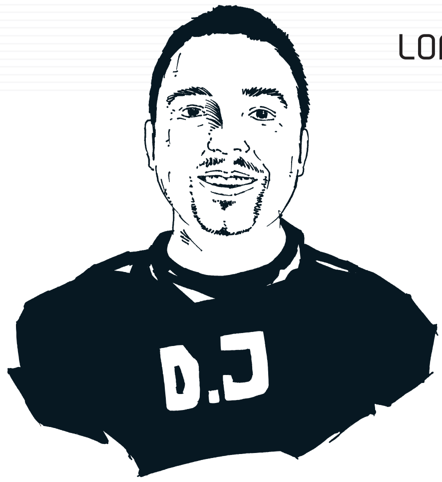
H.E.R.O., clearly, otherwise I'd have been telling an enormous fib these past two years or so in my 'Favourite game of all time' entry.
Expertise: Filling my entire office with boxes
Currently playing:
Juggle the deadlines
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



RICHARD BURTON

Fishing Derby – an obscure little game from Activision and David Crane. Not great as a one-player game, but comes into its own when playing against a mate. Ooh, those sharks…
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming
Currently playing:
Cavelon
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...



So here we are at the start of a brand new year and not only is your favourite retro magazine still going strong, but I truly believe that it's better than ever. Over the past 12 months we've blown open the doors at Rare, covered beloved franchises like *Space Invaders*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Donkey Kong* and *Doom* and gone behind the scenes of over 50 classic games. We've brought you some of Japan's most obscure delicacies, introduced a plethora of new features like Retro Shamer and Box of Delights, interviewed everyone from *NiGHTS*' Yuji Naka to *Pitfall!* creator David Crane and welcomed a brand new staff writer. And we're only just getting warmed up.

As we take our first tentative steps into a brave new year, **Retro Gamer** will continue doing what it does best; delivering the most informative and entertaining articles around. If you need any further proof of our commitment just take a quick flick through this latest issue. There's a full eight pages dedicated to Commodore's VIC-20 – something which is bound to please certain forumites – makings of *California Games*, *Loom*, *RoboCop* and the *Rick Dangerous* franchise and 18 pages dedicated to Atari's glorious 2600 console. You've never had it so good.

Enjoy the magazine



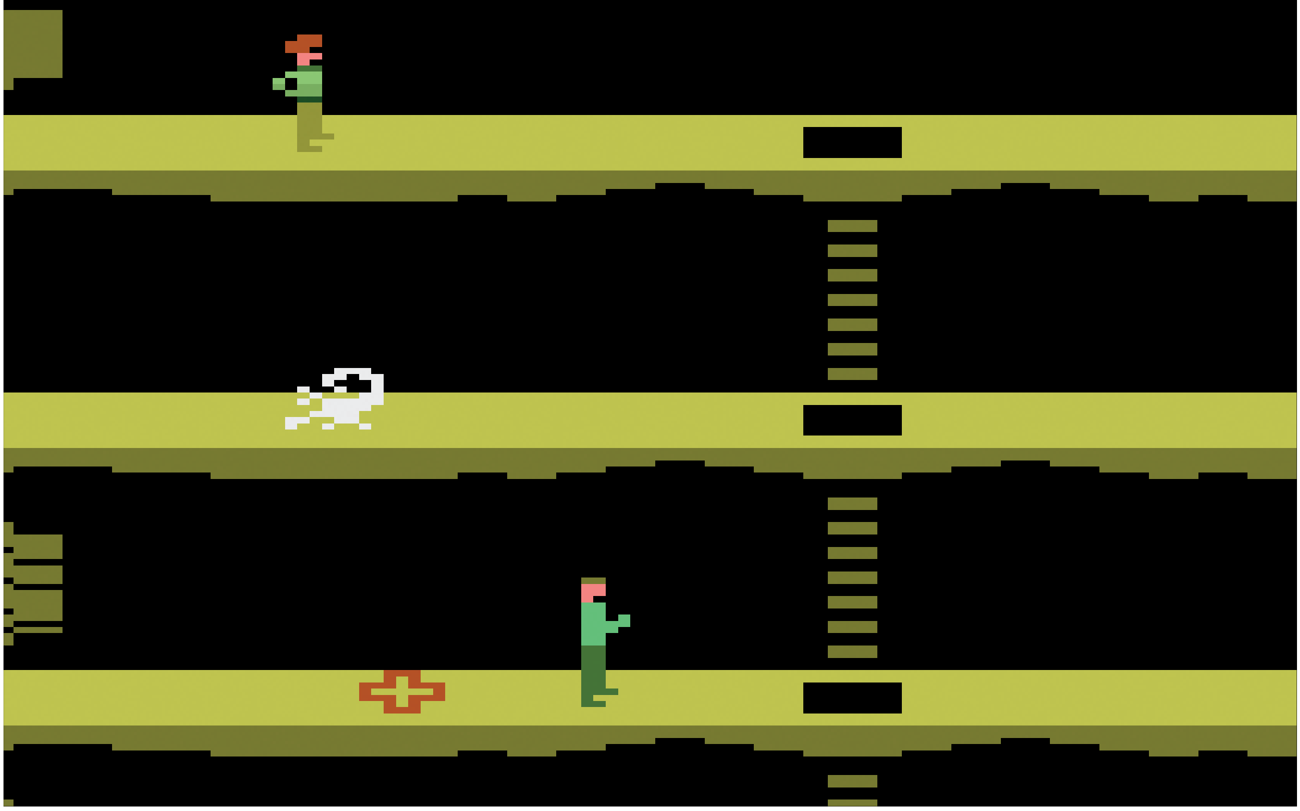


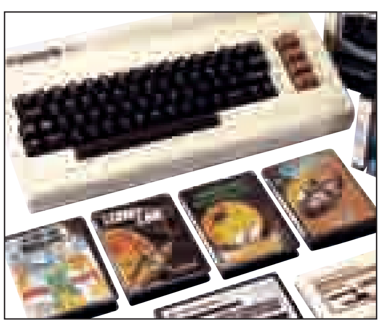
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BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

INSIDE

At-a-glance retro sections…

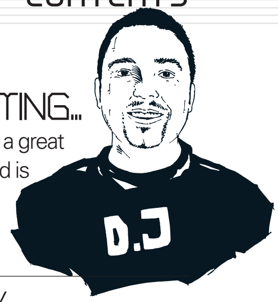






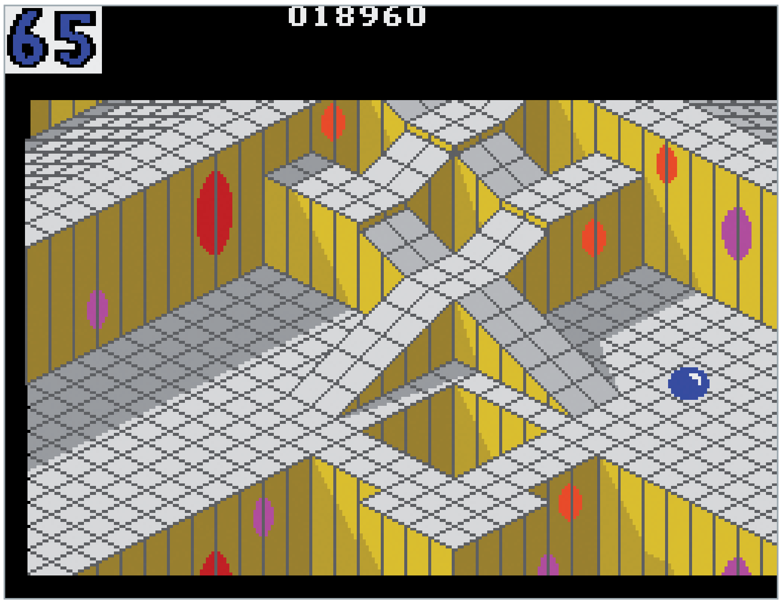


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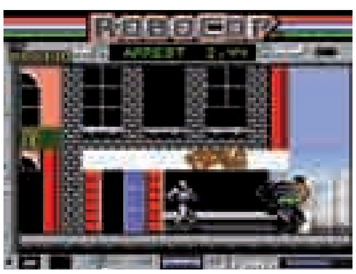


ESSENTIALS

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



THE MAKING OF…



RETRORATED

THE GAMES LISTING…

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it



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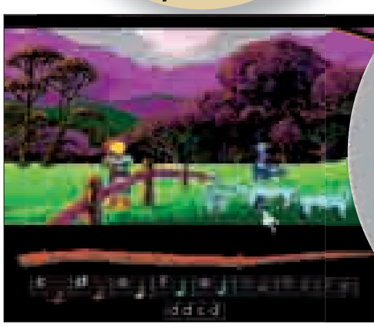
THE MAKING OF…

CALIFORNIA GAMES



THE BIG INTERVIEW

THE ARKS OF ATARI



THE MAKING OF…

LOOM

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…

MORE FROM SEGA

ANOTHER MONTH, ANOTHER ISSUE, ANOTHER PAGE OF SEGA NEWS



Burning Rangers, another great Sega Saturn game by Sonic Team.



Yep, they could be coming back, and they look pretty pleased about the prospect.

There's plenty of exciting news coming out of Sega HQ this month. So we've decided to dedicate a whole page of coverage to it. Sound familiar? It should do. We used these exact same sentences to kick off our news back in issue 44. But as long as Sega continues to sit in a room and throw darts at its old IPs to determine which one gets a revisit, we'll happily write about its dart-playing follies.

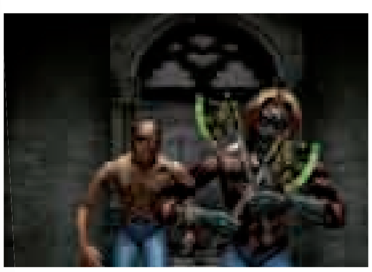
So, kicking things off this issue is news of the possible return of another underplayed, splendid Saturn game: *Burning Rangers*. Speaking to Games Radar recently, Sonic Team USA boss Takashi Iizuka hinted at a possible sequel. Iizuka said that he was fully aware of the demand for an update to the fire-fighting classic, "It's not my title, but I hear there's a lot of demand for a sequel, to bring out *Burning Rangers* on Wii so… we'll see."

A final hurrah from Sonic Team to the Sega Saturn, and a true testament of what the console could really accomplish in the right hands, *Burning Rangers* was a two-fingered salute to all of those doubters who believed that the Saturn was no more apt at creating dizzying 3D environs than the 32X was at being ergonomically pretty. One of the finest looking 3D games of the 32-bit era, fans have demanded that Sega bless them with a sequel to the classic. And it looks like there's a slight glimmer of hope that their wish could come true.

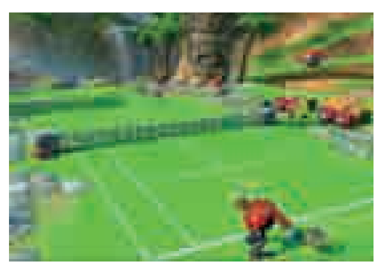
Also announced recently was the peculiar *Sega Superstars Tennis*, which is being handled by Sumo Digital, the guys responsible for the excellent *Virtua Tennis 3* conversions. And from the early screenshots we've seen, it certainly looks spookily similar to *Virtua Tennis*… save for a blue hedgehog and Green Hill Zone replacing the robotic-looking Henman losing on a generic clay court. The game will feature 15 Sega characters, and so far we can confirm that Sonic (well, duh), AiAi (of *Monkey Ball* fame) Amigo (*Samba De Amigo*) and Ulala (from *Space Channel 5*) are all seeded. Gary Knight of Sumo Digital had this telling collaboration of letters to say about the game, "The Sumo Digital team has access to a wealth of Sega IP and you'll be surprised at the gaming icons that will be making an appearance." So, could this mark the monumental return to the gaming circuit of the finest videogame character the world has ever seen? Well, sporting a colourful tracksuit, huge fists and a long monkey-man hairstyle, you could say Alex Kidd was 'Bjorn' for the part.

Also announced – in a bid to eke more use out of Nintendo's new Wii Zapper – were conversions of *House Of The Dead 2* and *III*. Come on Sega, why not release a new *House Of The Dead*, or how about the brilliant Japanese arcade gun game: *Let's Go Jungle!: Lost On The Island Of Spice*? Actually, how about any kind of bloody release of that brilliant arcade gun game! Huh?

While we're obviously happy that both games are getting a dusting off, we can't help but feel this is a rather lazy decision on Sega's part, especially as both games have appeared together once before on the Xbox (the second game was an unlockable extra in *HOTDIII*). A completely new *House Of The Dead* game would have been the way to go in our opinion. And seeing how popular *Resident Evil 4* was with Wii owners, there certainly appears to be a desire for more survival-horror affairs.

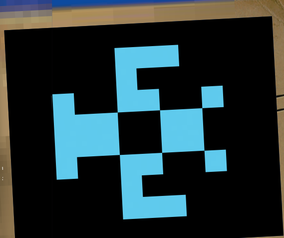


House Of The Dead 2 & 3 will be released on the Wii, and will make the most of the Wii Zapper.



Sega Superstars Tennis will feature many characters from Sega's past and present, including Sonic.

HERO OF THE MONTH



YAR

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of *Yars*

First appearance: *Yars' Revenge*
Distinguishing features: Bug eyes
Weapon of choice: Zorlon cannon
Most likely to: Gain some Atari loving
Least likely to: Buy a round
Interesting fact: Yars is named after Atari executive Ray Kassar

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 30: CABAL (ZX SPECTRUM)



Action-packed game; action-packed loading screen. One of the most exquisite visual representations of hi-octane we've ever seen. The *Cabal* loading screen can be seen as one of the fullest and most colourful loading lead-ins to ever blast onto the Speccy.

JUST IN WE'VE JUST SEEN SOME BRAND NEW SCREENSHOTS OF STREET FIGHTER 4 AND IT'S LOOKING GLORIOUS. CONFIRMED PUGILISTS INCLUDE RYU, KEN, CHUN-LI AND DHALSIM.

RAIDENS' STORM ONTO 360

THE CLASSIC SHMUP SERIES HITS HIGH DEFINITION



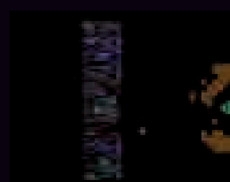
We're still feeling a little giddy at the prospect of finally getting to replay *Rez* and *Ikaruga* in glorious high definition, and now it's been announced that *Raiden Fighters Aces* and *Raiden IV* are also in the Xbox 360 pipeline.

We're not sure at the moment whether both games will eventually find a full international release (we certainly hope they will), but we are sure that the titles will help to increase the popularity of Microsoft's sophomore console within the Japanese and Asian territories. In a recent interview, UFO Interactive product manager Chong Ahn revealed that an American version of *Raiden IV* is currently in development and also hinted that the game will support co-op play over the Xbox Live Arcade. *Raiden Fighters Aces* is set for a 2008 release in Japan and will contain *Raiden Fighters, Raiden Fighters 2: Operation Hell Dive* and *Raiden Fighters Jet*, all playable in their original vertical dimensions and no doubt boasting some brand new Xbox 360 features.

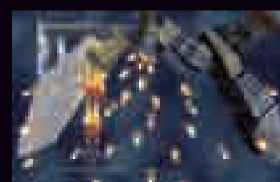
The release of *Raiden Fighters Aces* has got us all excited, but it also had us thinking about what other classic shoot-'em-ups we would love to see get a re-release on the Xbox 360… here's **Retro Gamer**'s wish list.

RG'S SHMUP WISH LIST

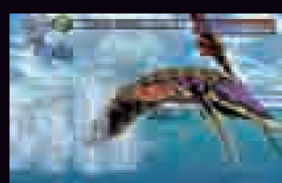
THE SHOOT-'EM-UPS THAT RETRO GAMER WOULD MOST LIKE TO SEE RE-RELEASED ON THE XBOX 360



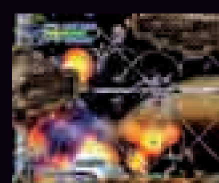
YARS' REVENGE Stuart's favourite 2600 game. He's always going on about how great the game would be with a 360 pad. What's so special about the controller? He says it has something to do with it feeling nice in his hand!



RADIANT SILVERGUN Well we're getting *Ikaruga*, so why not *Radiant*? You can't very well have one without the other, that would be like re-releasing *HOTDIII* without including *HOTD2* too, it'd be shmup sacrilege.



THUNDER FORCE IV One of the Saturn's most sublime blasters. Sadly, it never got a PAL release. That's a real shame; could you please remedy that please? We want to fight the fish boss in high definition!



BANGAI-O It's getting a DS release, apparently, so we're not too miffed if this doesn't find a big-screen release. To demand such things would be greedy, and we're a well-mannered bunch here at **Retro Gamer**.

THE COMMODORE 64 OWNER'S BIBLE

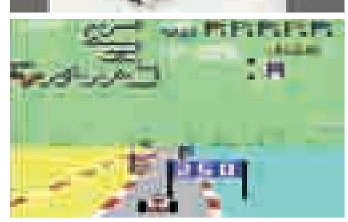
ANDREW FISHER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S KEYBOARD

Forget about *Harry Potter*, which is just a readable movie version of *Grange Hill*, but with wizards. Or *His Dark Materials*, which is simply about a compass and some armoured polar bears. The book that Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan should really be hawking on their next book club is: *The Commodore 64 Book – 1982-199X*. Which is a follow-up to Andrew Rollings' excellent ZX Spectrum book (Rolling's returns for editing duties).

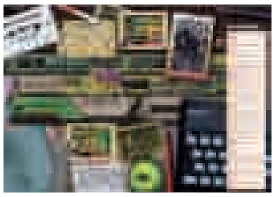


Retro Gamer freelancer Andrew Fisher delivers a wonderful slice of sublime Commodore nostalgia in a book that looks at over 200 classic (and not so classic) Commodore 64 games. Featuring screenshots, trivia, programmers and games, *The Commodore 64 Book* will prove to be the ideal piece of reading material for those who fawn over their computer as if it was a newborn dolphin. And if you didn't own a Commodore 64 back in the day, chances are you'll probably know at least seven people who did. It may be too late for Christmas now, but why not treat them all to a copy of this book, slap a smile over their faces and start spreading some 8-bit love. You'll have done an amazing thing, and made some good people very happy indeed. *The Commodore 64 Book – 1982-199X* is available from Hive Books or by visiting http://C64goldenyears.com.





LAST-MINUTE NEWS



A NOTE FOR YOUR RETRO CALENDAR THAT YOU HAVEN'T BOUGHT YET

RETRO DATES

Calendars are very handy objects, good for remembering important things like anniversaries, birthdays and when to pick up your latest issue of Retro Gamer. Well, no sooner had we finished cleaning out our chocolate advent calendars, than a glossy A3 one with art work of retro games landed on our desk, courtesy of ReverendPixel at Twelve Months in 8-bits.com. This slice of retro time-keeping features pages dedicated to classic retro games. Titles getting their own month will include Ocean's excellent *Wizball*, Melbourne's *Way Of The Exploding Fist* and Braben's interstellar classic *Elite*. The calendars sell at £9.95 plus postage, and print runs are limited so if you fancy one then get on over to www.retrogamingcalendars.com now.

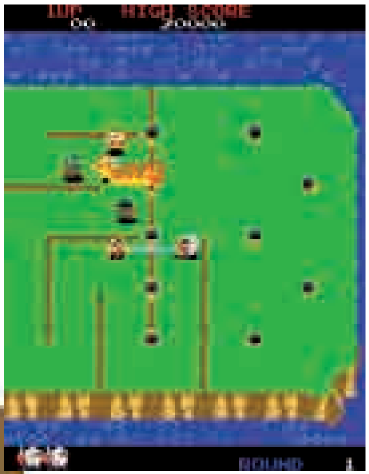
RE-RE-REMIX!

NAMCO, A MUSEUM AND NINTENDO WALK INTO A BAR

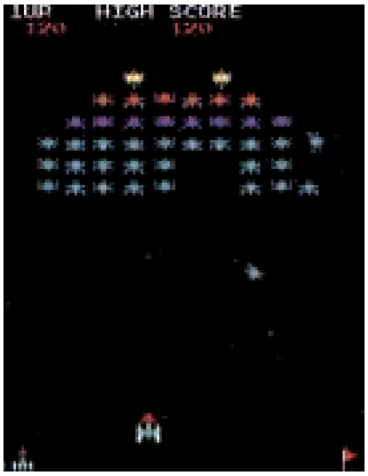
We're not really particularly big fans of Namco compilation packs. Sorry Namco, but your early games are slowly becoming the most regurgitated titles ever released. In fact, you can almost hear the detached sighs from Pac-Man and Dig Dug every time you boot up *Namco Museum 50th Anniversary*. So please forgive us if we're not overly excited about the recent news that *Namco Museum Remix* will be heading for Nintendo Wii.

Pac 'N Roll Remix, *Galaga Remix*, *Motos Remix*, *Rally-X Remix* and *Gator Panic Remix* are the remixed bunch that you'll be getting for your buck this time around. All will boast re-imagined graphics and the horrifying probability that they will all support the Wii-remote.

On top of all this, Namco Bandai has also announced that it is going to be releasing *Namco Museum DS*. The pack will include non-remixed versions of *Xevious*, *Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, *Galaxian*, *Pac-Man Vs*, *Mappy*, *Dig Dug II* and *The Tower Of Druaga*. There is one thing about this new pack, however, that could make it an essential purchase come release day: *Pac-Man Vs*. Yes, finally, multiplayer wireless *Pac-Man*. The added bonus is that the game is four-person playable with one version of the game. Also, like the excellent *Konami Arcade Classics* collection (which gets a review in this very issue) you'll also get to play the games in DS-style modes and in their original 'stand-up arcade' style. Both *Namco Museum DS* and *Namco Museum Remix* are due for release next summer, so expect a review from us reasonably soon.



Dig Dug II will soon be making an appearance on the DS.



Original versions of *Galaxian* will be feature on the Wii and DS.



Rescue the maiden Ki from *The Tower Of Druaga* on the DS.

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



GENERAL CUSTER

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH

Without bad villains there would be no good heroes. What would Batman be without the Joker? What would Mario be without Bowser? Complete rubbish, that's what. This month: General Custer

First appearance: *Custer's Revenge*

Distinguishing features: He's naked

Weapon of choice: Erm, his little big horn

Most Likely to: Be on the Sex Offenders' List

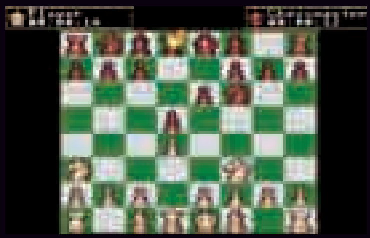
Least likely to: Own clothes

Unusual fact: Custer sounds like custard.

XBOX LIVE PAWN

CHECK YOUR MATES ONLINE

With every RTS on the planet having black and white blood cells in its veins, videogames and chess are inexplicably linked. Perhaps the most popular videogame iteration of the game is the *Chessmaster* franchise. Spanning almost two decades, budding Kasparov's will soon be able to checkmate their mates through Xbox Live. *Chessmaster LIVE* will have a plethora of differing levelled AI opponents to allow the pro or novice to learn, improve and master their skills gradually. Speaking about the game, Ubisoft's Peter Helm said, "Bringing the *Chessmaster* series to Xbox Live Arcade makes the game accessible to a whole new audience. *Chessmaster LIVE* is not only a comprehensive chess program, but it is also one that has expanded beyond the traditional game to include exciting features for fans, both old and new." The game will have voice chat and a 'Message Chess' option to allow thoughtful and considered grandmasters to stretch a match over a whole month. Ubisoft has announced that it will be releasing *Chessmaster LIVE* to the Marketplace some time in January.





Originally released in 1986, *Chessmaster* is going to make an appearance on the Xbox Live Arcade in 2008.

THE GALLERY

THIS ISSUE WE TAKE A GANDER AT FLYERS THAT LOOKED SO HILARIOUS WE JUST HAD TO GET THEM PUBLISHED INSIDE SOME KIND OF MAGAZINE…



EURO CONTINENTAL STAR
Released 1982
Featured Artwork Belgium
Does it sell the game?
Not even history's greatest artists working in unison could turn a pinball bingo machine, which resembles something that a colour-blind grandad might construct in his garden shed, into a saleable product. The moniker bestowed on the machine sounds like some new premium service that the Eurostar is trying to peddle. The cabinet itself looks so cluttered its score board actually contains several colours that haven't even been invented yet.
What's cool about it?
Not one iota of this flyer speaks cool. Crap, sure, but cool? No
What's naff about it?
Everything – the entire look of it all – the machine, the poster, you name it.
Trivia The Channel Tunnel is 31.35 miles in length.



RAGE IN THE CAGE
Released 1997
Featured Artwork US
Does it sell the game?
Since when did winning a ball ever become 'the rage'? Levi jeans, Rebok pumps and laughing at N-Gage owners, all became rakish, not ball-winning, that's just a fictional rage-statement wielded to tempt poor rageless saps into parting with lose change to help them feel 'rage inclusive' – which, quite frankly, is rage-inducing.
What's cool about it?
Set one down in a rough arcade parlour without the fear it being caked in graffiti in minutes.
What's naff about it?
The flyer boasts "the chance to win redemption tickets" – something you can use to queue-jump to heaven?
Trivia Urban satirical street artist Banksy keeps his true identity concealed to near superhero levels.



PUNCH BELLY
Released 1996
Featured Artwork US
Does it sell the game?
The game exhibits a perfect example of moniker clarity by telling you all you need to know about the game in two words. After depositing your cash into its mouth, you get the chance to punch a guy in the belly without consequence. In that way it could be seen as an arcade version of *Hostel*… but for the squeamish and the skint.
What's good about it?
You get to sock a rotund guy in the belly.
What's naff about it?
It's one of those machines that attracts jerks who like to let everyone in the arcade know they're playing by shouting raucously while looking over their shoulders to see if any females are checking them out.
Trivia Greek Pankration is the earliest example of mixed martial arts combat – a precursor to cage fighting.



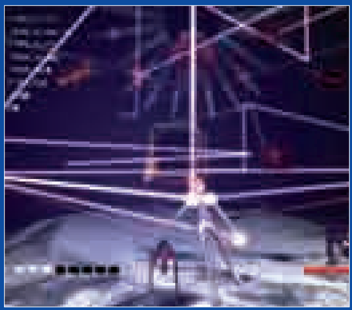
PUTTING CHALLENGE
Released 1991
Featured Artwork US
Does it sell the game?
Someone really aught to tell these guys that you don't actually need to dress up to play arcade games – they're even wearing golf shoes for God's sake. If you come across these caddyshacks in your local arcade, do the world a favour and draw their attention to that fact. We'd hate them to receive further clothes-related ridicule.
What's good about it?
The chauvinistic moustachioed guy helping his partner make the putt. "You see the ball, you see that hole? You have to get the ball in the hole. Do you want me to draw a picture?"
What's naff about it?
It's missing something but we're not sure what… Bill Murray wielding a shotgun at a chuckling gopher perhaps?
Trivia In *Caddyshack* the noise the gopher makes is actually vocalised by Flipper the dolphin.

retro GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO…

EVENT HOSTING retro GAMER
IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past, that doesn't mean there aren't any games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



JANUARY 08

REZ

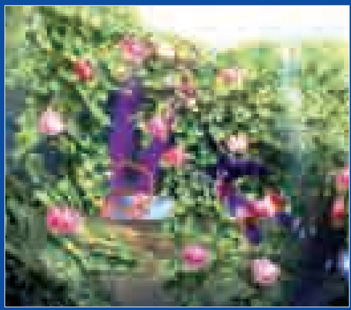
Released: January

Publisher: Q Entertainment

Price: 1,200 Points

Format: Xbox Live Arcade

It's a little-known fact that Sega's *Rez* is one of the greatest games ever made. Originally released on Sega's Dreamcast, it's a beautiful fusion of mesmerising sound and abstract visuals and is quite unlike any other on-rails shooter. Anyway, it's now been announced for Xbox Live Arcade so with any luck a brand-new generation of gamers will be able to discover this fantastic title.



JANUARY 08

NiGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

Released: 25 January

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

So it turns out that the amazing flying segments we saw in *NiGHTS: Journey Of Dreams* make up only a small section of the main game. Luckily this means that at least one section of the main game is going to be absolutely incredible, but we're suddenly a little more wary of the final product. Especially now we know that Nights can now talk. Ugh!



JANUARY 08

GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

Released: 25 January

Publisher: Sierra Entertainment

Price: £39.99: Wii/£29.99: DS

Format: Wii, DS

It's not often that we admit to being wrong, but it's become obvious to us that the Xbox Live version of *Geometry Wars* was actually far better than *Bankshot Billiards 2*. Anyway, now that's off our chests, we can start getting excited about the impromptu sequel, which features more levels, more visuals and well… more everything really.



FEBRUARY 08

NEW INTERNATIONAL TRACK & FIELD

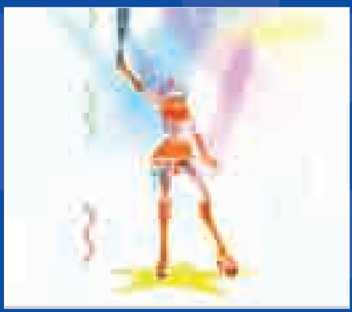
Released: 22 February

Publisher: Konami

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Sumo Digital certainly likes its sports games. As well as working on *Sega Superstars Tennis*, it's also putting the finishing touches to this re-imagining of Konami's classic sports franchise. Seeing a super-deformed Pyramid Head from the *Silent Hill* series has already turned a few heads, so let's see what other characters will be announced.



FEBRUARY 08

SEGA SUPERSTARS TENNIS

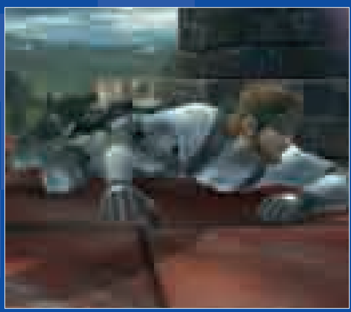
Released: 29 February

Publisher: Sega

Price: £29.99-£49.99

Format: PS3, Wii, 360, PS3, DS

Once upon a time Capcom was dominating our diary and earning all our love, but now that love has been transferred to Sega. *Sega Superstars Tennis* looks set to include a host of characters ranging from Sonic, to some of the charming primates from *Super Monkey Ball*. Best of all, though, is the return of *Space Channel 5*'s Ulala. Up, down, up, down, serve, serve, serve.



FEBRUARY 08

SUPER SMASH BROS MELEE

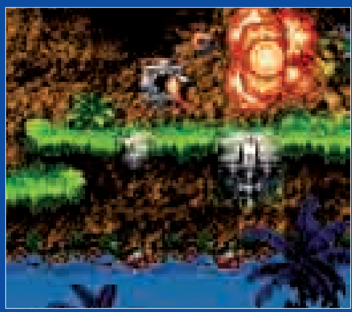
Released: March

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £39.99

Format: Wii

Yes, it is frustrating that the damned thing keeps getting pushed back, but it's hard to complain when the end result could well be the most comprehensive battler ever. The latest news from the *Super Smash Bros* grapevine is that Diddy Kong and Sonic are now playable characters and that it will include a level select with a brand new level available for download each day. We literally bursting with joy.



MARCH 08

CONTRA 4

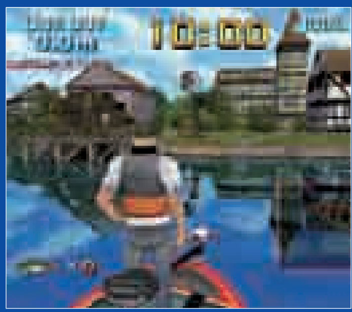
Released: March

Publisher: Konami

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

We weren't expecting great things from *Contra 4*. After all, it was being put together by a company best known for its education and TV licences and it uses a grappling hook for goodness sake. Imagine how pleasantly surprised we were when we discovered that *Contra 4* not only turned out to be DS's best action title, but very nearly gives the amazing *Contra III* a run for its money. You can read the full review on page 92.



MARCH 08

SEGA BASS FISHING

Released: 23 March (US)

Publisher: Sega

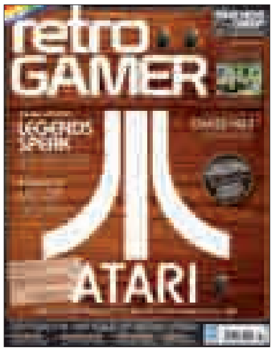
Price: £39.99

Format: Wii

While there's little doubt that a fishing game will work perfectly on Wii, we can't help wondering why Sega is bothering with a bass game. We all know that the bass is the most dreary of fishes – not as smart as a perch and lacking the killer instinct of a pike. Worst of all they became really arrogant after the original arcade game was such a hit, and are apparently already making ridiculous demands. Stupid fish.

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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STAR LETTER!

FATHER AND SON

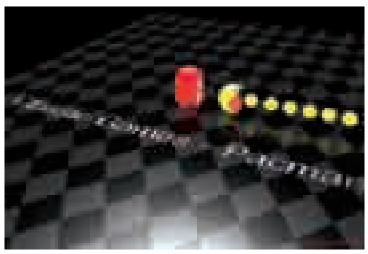
Dear Retro Gamer,
I'm a 38-year-old retro gamer and I live in Athens, Greece. I love your mag, as it features all the classic games that filled my childhood years and it's the only magazine I read every month. You're doing a great job in all aspects of electronic entertainment and I hope it continues for years to come. No other magazine does such a great job at uncovering the history behind the wonderful world of games.

Your magazine will be, in the future, a games encyclopedia for my seven-year-old son. I've made a 3D screen as a gift for all of you on the magazine, as you make my childhood memories so real I can pass them on easily to my son.

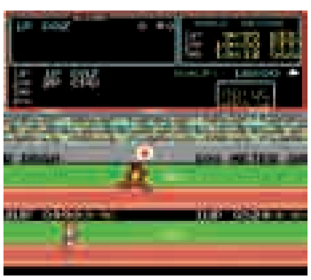
Thank you very much and keep up the good work.

Best wishes,
Michael Atalialis

Thank you for the images, Michael. We're currently using them as screensavers and they work a treat. We're glad you're enjoying the magazine so much and appreciate the fact that you think we're doing something special. Hopefully both you and your son will continue enjoying the magazine for years to come. We certainly love writing it.



» One of the great images that Michael was kind enough to create for us.



» Mark has been finding *Track & Field* hard on the DS. Does anyone else have the same problem?

NOT SO CLASSIC KONAMI COMPILATION

Dear Retro Gamer
I've just bought *Konami Classics Series: Arcade Hits* on the Nintendo DS and, well, I'll come straight to the point, who thought putting *Track & Field* on the DS was a good idea? Don't get me wrong, it's still a good game and the conversion is as close to the original coin-op as it can be, but pounding those X, Y, A, B buttons at any kind of speed is almost impossible.

Why not just use the touch screen to replicate the buttons of the original arcade game? Then again, why not replace *Track & Field* with *Frogger*, *Gyruss* or *Mikie*? You can tell that a lot of care has gone into the package (I have the American version) and I love the idea of playing games in their original vertical-screen ratios, it's just a few niggles like, why *Track & Field*, the difficult-to-see bullets in *Gradius* and *Rainbow Bell Adventure* and limited credits in *Contra*.

Yours sincerely,
Mark Hoggs, Derbyshire

Sorry to hear that you're not fully enjoying Konami's Arcade Hits *compilation. It's admittedly got a few issues, but we didn't really encounter any problems playing* Track & Field *though. Maybe we've just got exceptionally small fingers…*

It's quite possible that the other games you've mentioned will crop up on a sequel at some point, so let's hope that this first one sells well enough, as we'd love to play the likes of Frogger, Gradius III *and* Vendetta *while on the move.*



EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

HIGH-SCORE WAR?

Dear Retro Gamer,
Why do you not feature a high-score section in **Retro Gamer**? I play plenty of brilliant arcade games on MAME and I'm sure that a lot of your other readers out there do the same. It would be really fascinating to see if anyone has come close to beating any of my high scores on games like *Pac-Man*, *Galaga* and *Rally-X*.

You could run a different competition every month, and you could even tell people where they could download the game from so that anybody would be able to take part. I think this would be a great idea and I'd love to see it implemented in a future issue of the magazine.

Kindest regards,
Francis Whittaker

Thanks for the idea, Francis. We've looked at the possibility of doing a high-score table in the past but thought it might be a bit childish, as you normally see them in magazines aimed at a younger market. Also, the downloading of ROMs is actually illegal, so I don't think software publishers would be too pleased if we actively directed our readers to dubious websites. Still, plenty of classic games are available on compilations, so maybe we could go down that route.



» We played the NES version of *Galaga* and weren't even able to beat the standard high score of 30,000. Surely our readers can do better?

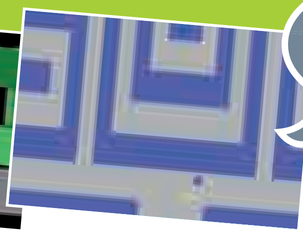
COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Hi All,
I've been an avid reader of **Retro Gamer** for about two years now, and have been a subscriber for about five months but have never felt compelled to write to you until now.

I just want to congratulate you on a fantastic issue (Load 44). I absolutely loved the Master System feature, which brought back many happy memories of trading games when I was a youngster. Games such as *Psycho Fox*, *The Dragon's Trap* and *California Games* provided hours of fun (and in some cases frustration). I had an Xbox 360, which lasted approximately six months before I got bored with the fact that all the games were either too easy or all very similar.

I now have a collection of retro machines, which I adore and spend a lot of my spare time using to attempt to revisit my youth (paunch and lack of hair not withstanding). My SNES, N64 and Dreamcast are all fantastic





FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE ATARI 2600 GAMES IS

ID: reech
H.E.R.O. taught me that a guy with a chopper doesn't need fantastic graphics to be exciting. Erm…

ID: kelp7
Without a shadow of a doubt *Cosmic Ark*. Fantastic two-player game. Never did get past that second set of Pac-Man-looking creatures.

ID: jimid2
Vanguard! Probably the very, very first home console game I was ever obsessive about.

ID: khisanth
None, as I think they are all pretty bad. It pains me, as a retro gamer, to say that.

ID: GovanGer
Ghostbusters. I was about six or seven years old and thought it was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen.

ID: uglifruit
Combat. On the Invisible Tanks with guided missiles setting. With Doug sitting next to me, giving brotherly love a bad name as the air turned blue.

ID: fredghostmaster
Kaboom! was my favourite. It was a great day when I wiped the smile off the Mad Bomber's face!

ID: jimbo_too
Adventure. I have played and replayed this one so many times. Magic…

ID: TMR
I'd have to say *Yars' Revenge* at the moment because it's so simple, but I can spend hours playing it without realising.

ID: SirClive
I wonder who will be the first to say *Custer's Revenge*?

but it is my Mega Drive that keeps me coming back for more.

I love the auction watch feature in the price listings section but think it would be great if it were expanded. My friends and I speak about this regularly and would like to see this section expanded to a few pages each month, if possible, because we like to know what sort of prices various titles reach.

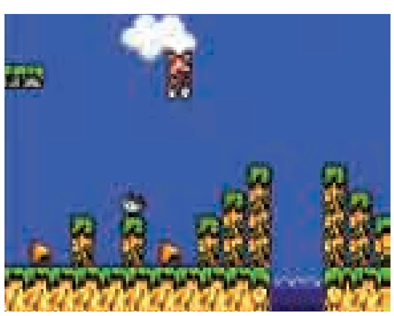
We also really enjoyed the collector's corner feature and hope that this is going to be a regular thing as it's always nice to hear of others with the same habit (obsession?) as us.

Otherwise just keep doing what you are doing and keep retro heads like myself happy for years to come.

Cheers

Andy, via email

We're very pleased to hear that you're enjoying the magazine, Andy. We are also well aware that a great many of our readers aren't currently happy with the buyer's guide (although most want to abolish it completely) and we are looking at a few potential ways to spice it up a little bit. Collector's Corner on the other hand is proving very popular and has gone down extremely well; so don't expect it to disappear any time soon.



» *Psycho Fox* brought back fond memories for Andy in issue 44.

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Collector's Corner



THIS MONTH'S COLLECTOR'S CORNER SEES HENRIK BORIN, A 26-YEAR-OLD SWEDISH WOODSMAN SHOWING OFF HIS RATHER IMPRESSIVE RPG COLLECTION

Retro Gamer: When did you first start playing games and what was your first system?

Henrik Borin: I think it was at my day mother's house. She had a Nintendo NES with one or two games that the other kids and I used to sit and play with. My older brother had a Commodore 64 that I was occasionally able to use (providing of course that I had his permission). My best friend also had a Commodore 64 with about three or four tape games that we constantly used to play whenever I went over to his house. I can't remember all of the games but *Jet Set Willy* was definitely one of them. I think that this must have been sometime around 1985 and 1986.

» Henrik's most precious title, *Chronicles Of Osgorth*. Don't expect him to part with it any time soon.



My 'own' first system was some weird *Pong* console I 'inherited' from my brother that I don't actually remember the name of. It had the ordinary *Pong* and *Hockey* on it and a battery-driven black thing with two joysticks. I eventually got a NES for Christmas 1986 with *Super Mario*, *Duck Hunt* and a Zapper. Then, just before 1990 my dad bought me a 386 computer, so I was eventually gaming on three different systems. Later systems I have owned include a SNES, a Mega Drive II with a Sega CD add-on that I ended up buying from a flea market for roughly £15 and eventually a N64, GameCube and Nintendo Wii.

RG: When did you start collecting?

HB: Well I've always been gaming on several different systems, but I never really considered collecting for any of them at first. My interest for New World Computing eventually started around 1991, when I received *Might And Magic II* for my 386. I became so hooked on that game that I bought every new game in that series on the day of release. I didn't really think of that as collecting though, that actually started about six years ago when I got my first job. All of a sudden I was able to buy all these games that I could never afford when I was a kid, so I bought a few games from an auction site (*Eye Of The Beholder*, *Curse Of The Azure Bonds*, *Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession* and the *AD&D: Masterpiece Collection*) for a very reasonable price. I was eager for them to arrive as I had heard a lot about these games and tried to test them, but I had never actually had the opportunity to really play them on my own.

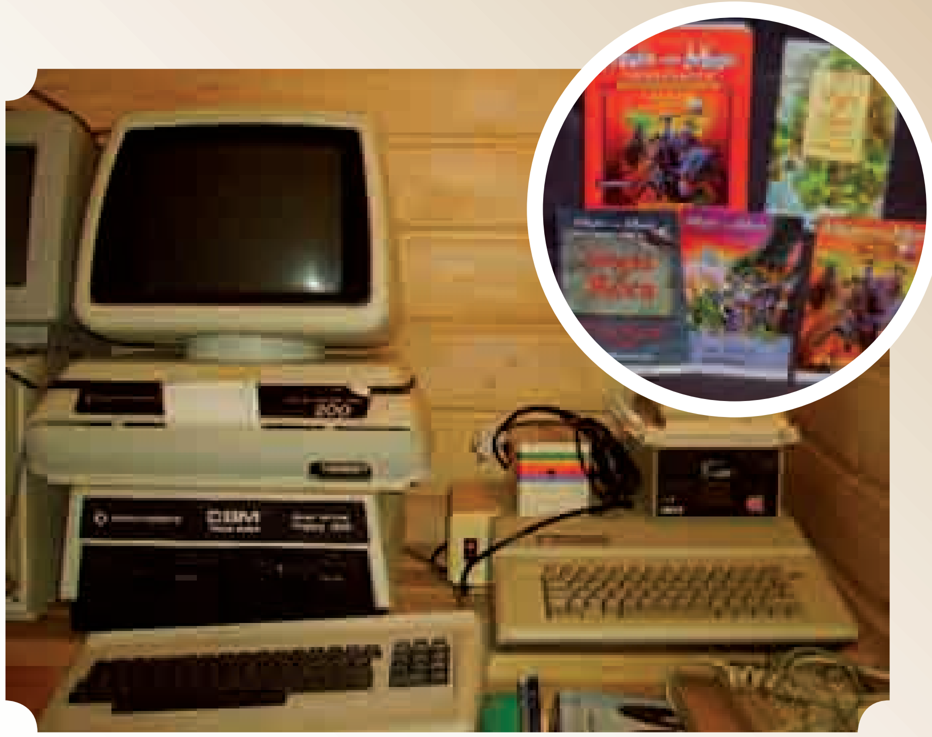
And I found them so fun and intriguing that I wanted to test the other games of those series, and so I bought them and then I got this idea that I wanted a complete set of the Gold Box games, so I aimed at getting all of them, and that way it has continued up to the present day. Not content with my RPG collection I also bought a new NES from a friend after I had sold off my original machine to pay for a Nintendo 64. Once I had a new NES I immediately started up a NES/Famicom collection. Finally, I was also able to persuade my brother to give me his Amiga 500 and Commodore 64. I immediately started buying games and peripherals for both machines and now have quite a nice collection.

RG: Why have you chosen to focus on RPGs?

HB: It's kind of hard to explain, but I've always been a RPG nut. I used to play a lot of *Pool Of Radiance* and *Bard's Tale* on my friend's C64



» Just a small part of Henrik's impressive SSI collection. How many games do you recognise?



» Two old computers that are bound to make many gamers nostalgic. **Inset:** A few games from Henrik's *Might And Magic* collection.

(when he got a disk drive) as well as plenty of RPGs like *Zelda II* and *Castlevania II* on the NES. I've also always been a big fan of fantasy and used to watch *He-Man* as a kid and read lots of *Conan The Barbarian* comics. I guess there must be an adventuring streak in me, as I love exploring unknown caves, fighting monsters and getting treasure. I also dabble in the action, strategy and FPS genres and enjoy games like *Red Alert* and *Far Cry*. For me though, RPGs will always be my number one.

RG: The vast majority of your RPGs appear to be computer based, do you prefer these to Japanese/console RPGs
HB: Yes, European computer RPGs in general tend to be more mature in a way, darker and sometimes sinister, like the *Ravenloft* series, for example. Japanese and console RPGs tend to be more colourful and cute, and (in my opinion) too linear. Granted, some console RPGs like *Shadowrun* on the SNES and *Castlevania II* on NES are fun to play, but I will always prefer computer RPGs to their console counterparts.

RG: You're obviously a big fan of *Might And Magic*, what's the appeal?
HB: I have no idea really what sparked the interest initially. Maybe it was the chance to actually see your opponent from far away in *Might And Magic III*. Previous *Might And Magic*s and other computer RPGs I had played before had monsters pop up right in your face on certain squares, so being able to see them from far away and maybe avoid them or fill them with arrows before engaging was very cool. I also liked that New World Computing always made its games with a bit of humour; I enjoyed all its Easter eggs and references to *Star Trek*.

RG: Please tell us your favourite *Dungeons & Dragons* game and what makes it so special to you.



» Cardboard boxes means it's not always easy to find these old games in perfect condition.

"CHRONICLES OF OSGORTH IS PROBABLY MY MOST EXPENSIVE GAME AT THE MOMENT. I WAS ALMOST GIDDY WITH JOY WHEN I SECURED IT ON EBAY"

HB: It has to be *Pool Of Radiance*. I played it all the time with my friend; taking turns on mapping and playing, so there are a lot of childhood memories that come up whenever I play it.

RG: What's the most expensive game in your collection?
HB: That's a bit hard to say, mainly because prices are constantly up and down. However, I think *Chronicles Of Osgorth: Shattered Alliance* is probably my most expensive game at the moment. I was almost giddy with joy when I secured it on eBay, as fellow collectors had warned me that it wouldn't be easy to find and would be very expensive.

RG: What was the hardest game to source?
HB: Again, *Chronicles Of Osgorth*, as I had been searching for it for almost two years without a trace, and the collectors that had it wouldn't let it go (not for a reasonable price that is). It eventually appeared on eBay together with *Geopolitique 1990* and *Imperium Galactium* for $100 so I snapped it up. It's certainly not a common sight on eBay and I've never seen one since.

RG: Is there anything you're particularly proud of?
HB: It would have to be my SSI Collection. It's been a long and hard road obtaining everything I have, and it's definitely been expensive, but I've had a lot of fun so far.

RG: Where do you obtain your games?
HB: Mostly I trade with other collectors, but when they don't have what I want it's mostly eBay or various auction sites/collector forums. Occasionally I will go to car-boot sales and flea markets.

RG: What ten RPGs would you recommend to start people's collections?
The Golden Box Series, no doubt, which consists of *Pool Of Radiance*, *Curse Of The Azure Bonds*, *Secret Of The Silver Blades*, *Champions Of Krynn*, *Dark Queen Of Krynn*, *Death Knights Of Krynn*, *Gateway To The Savage Frontier*, *Treasures Of The Savage Frontier* and *Pools Of Darkness*. As that's only nine games I would also recommend *Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession*.

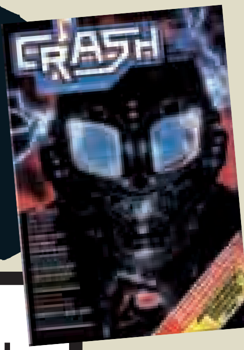
If you have a collection that you feel the rest of **Retro Gamer**'s readership needs to know about then please contact us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1984



February 1984 – Crash magazine hits the newsstands, Psyclapse and Bandersnatch are advertised, PCG goes monthly, Hunchback arrives, Ultimate and Horace get the ROM treatment and a hopeless joystick gets released. Richard Burton gets waggling…



Newsfield Publications' first mag, *Crash*, was released. It was such a hit that the new Spectrum game magazine issued an apology to be printed in several magazines regretting that the initial print run sold out so quickly leaving many searching haplessly for this most-wanted periodical. The initial 60,000 issues sold out but the company promised to up the print run for the next instalment. The magazine itself was like a breath of fresh air compared to some of the gaming magazines of the time. Gone were the endless error-riddled type-ins and in came page upon page of game reviews.

Another magazine going through a change was *Personal Computer Games*, which, due to its popularity, transformed from a quarterly magazine to a monthly read in just three issues. The February issue was the first of the monthly editions.

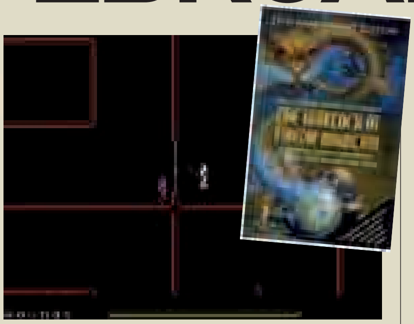
Puffin Books, not known for being a big hitter in the software market, jumped in with several new releases all accompanied by a paperback. Its first offering was *The Korth Trilogy.* The set of three games, best described as 'arcade adventures', were available individually complete with a book for £4.95 on the Spectrum.

Its next release was a game based on the first *Fighting Fantasy* novel released by Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone, *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain.* The game was programmed by Crystal Computing, who also released *Cosmic Guerilla* on the Spectrum.

The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain was an arcade-adventure/dungeon-maze game rather than a flowchart-style text adventure that the book format used. £6.95 would get you the game with a copy of the book. Hint: Buy the book, leave the game.



» *Personal Computer Games*, another magazine doing so well that the bi-monthly read turned monthly.



» *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain* (Spectrum): A classic book let down by a graphically unimaginative game.

Ocean Software, after successfully launching the first officially licensed game in the mechanically reclaimed form of *Mr Wimpy*, was now ready to release the first arcade conversion of *Hunchback* across a plethora of 8-bit formats, with the full backing of the original manufacturer, Century Electronics.

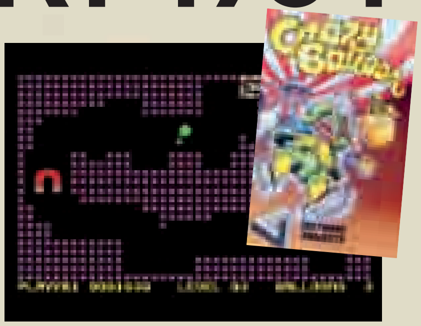
Elsewhere, Software Projects was ready to release *Crazy Balloon* on the C64 and Activision had added the finishing touches to *River Raid* for Atari 2600.

Dragon had Cuthbert, Amstrad had Roland, Spectrum had Horace and BBC was about to get Felix. In what was planned as an ongoing series of games, Micro Power released its first *Felix* title, *Felix In The Factory* onto BBC Micro and newly released Electron.

Adverts from Imagine Software began seeping into game magazines with details of two new mega-games it was working on, *Psyclapse* on C64 and *Bandersnatch* on Spectrum. As anyone who has viewed the *Commercial Breaks TV* programme doing the rounds on the internet will know, these two behemoth-sized projects contributed to the downfall of the company by being too ambitious. That, and the large debts Imagine owed to tape duplicators and various other parties. The advert stated, "*Psyclapse* and *Bandersnatch*: two of the most exhilarating experiences ever. Can you wait?" The liquidators couldn't…



» *Hunchback* (C64): Ocean's first official arcade game conversion turned out to be a firm favourite among gamers.



» *Crazy Balloon* (C64): One of Software Project's earliest C64 releases was simple yet strangely addictive.

Over in 'Crap Peripheral Corner', a newly released joystick from Grant Designs for Spectrum was attracting attention. The idea was sound. Instead of connecting a joystick to your machine via an interface why not piggyback it onto the keyboard by using the cursor keys as connectors. Sounds feasible. Well, it would've been if the plastic used to construct it was a bit stronger than a melting Curly Wurly. The plastic lugs that held it in place over the keyboard broke off if you played anything more vigorous than *Scrabble*, therefore rendering it a complete lemon. Thankfully it never got the chance to cross paths with *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*…

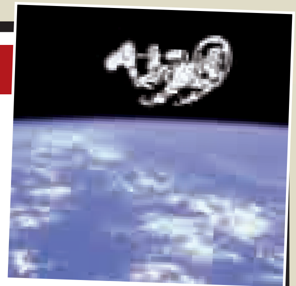
Spectrum owners with an Interface 2 rejoiced with news that the long-



» *Felix In The Factory* (BBC): The *Felix* franchise never took off in the way Roland, Horace and Cuthbert did. Okay game though.

THIS MONTH IN... CHARTS

1984

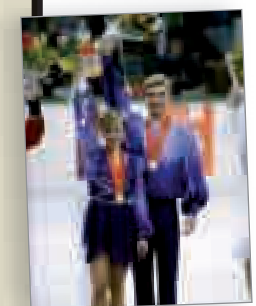


» Fancy a stroll? Untethered space walks were a reality with the aid of rocket packs and bowels of steel.

Valentine's Day saw gold medals for Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean as they won the Olympic ice skating event at the Winter Olympiad in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. Their rendition of Ravel's Bolero attracted a UK television audience of 24 million people as they beat off the usual challenge from Russian skaters. It was the only medal won by Great Britain during the games. Later that year they triumphed at the BBC Sports Personality Of The Year awards, coming ahead of the world space hopper champion and some bloke who plays conkers…

29 February saw the long-standing Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Trudeau, announce his resignation after 15 years in office.

The world's first untethered space walk took place on 7 February, when astronauts Bruce McCandless II and Robert Stewart left the Challenger space shuttle using Manned Maneuvering Units – basically a rocket propulsion pack that fitted on to the back of a spacesuit. McCandless can now proudly lay claim to being the first human Earth-orbiting satellite after venturing out 320 feet from the space shuttle. We sincerely hope the gas filtration system in his spacesuit was working to full capacity…



» Torvill and Dean won Britain's only medal of the 1984 Winter Olympics. They later opened a branch of Interflora…



» Grant Designs' new joystick clipped onto your Spectrum and within minutes had snapped off. Plenty of stick but not much joy.

mooted wave of software releases on ROM cartridge had started to filter through. Adding to the early and unexciting releases, such as *Chess* and *Backgammon*, came ROM-cart versions of four Ultimate games, *Pssst*, *Cookie*, *Jetpac* and *Tranz Am* and two Horace games, *Hungry Horace* and *Horace And The Spiders*. Cartridges ranged from £9.95 and £14.95 – a lot less than you'd pick them up on eBay today.

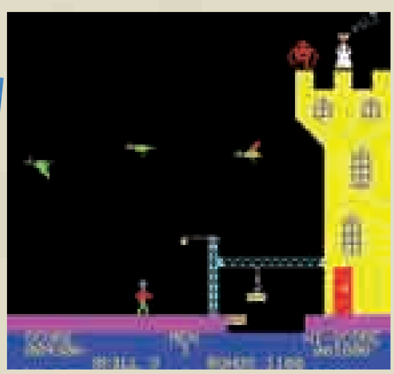
Personal Computer Games reviewed over 70 new games with its Game Of The Month going to *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* (Llamasoft, C64) and its PCG Hit going to *Lunar Jetman* (Ultimate, Spectrum), *Zorgon's Revenge* (IJK Software, Oric) and *Valhalla* (Legend, Spectrum). It also had an award for the most downright awful, waste-of-space game of the month. February's stench-filled winner was *Owzat* (Virgin, BBC), a cricket simulation that crashed at every given opportunity.

Crash didn't introduce its Crash Smash status until issue 4 so we had a less jazzily titled Game Of The Month award, which saw *3D Deathchase* (Micromega) crowned Best In Show. Oddly, Ultimate's *Lunar Jetman* out-scored *3D Deathchase* in all but one review category and finished with a higher score yet couldn't squeeze into top spot. Other high scorers included *Push Off* (Software Projects), *Exterminator* (Silversoft), *Bugaboo (The Flea)* (Quicksilva) and *Ant Attack* (Quicksilva).

C&VG seemed to be a little behind this month, awarding its Game Of The Month to *Atic Atac* (Ultimate, Spectrum) which came out a few months previous. Other games that got an airing were *Mr Wimpy* (Ocean, Spectrum), *Jetpac* (Ultimate, VIC-20), *Defence Force* (Tansoft, Oric) and *Stonkers* (Imagine, Spectrum). It also catered for console gamers with *Decathlon* (Activision, Atari 2600) and *Super Cobra* (Parker Brothers, Intellivision).



» *Decathlon* (2600): Frantic joystick waggling, if that's possible, with the stiff Atari 2600 joystick. Wrists of steel required.

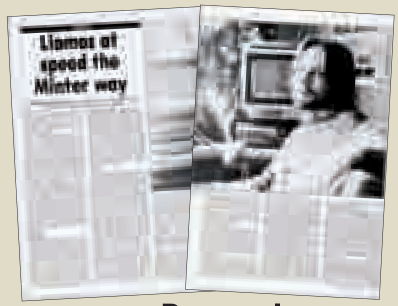


» *Zorgon's Revenge* (Oric): One of the earliest games to appear on the Oric and possibly one of the best.

Commodore Horizons



Issue 2 of the Commodore magazine took time to talk to Llamasoft's Jeff Minter about his company, games and camels. He spoke about his first computer, a ZX80 and went on to criticise *Manic Miner* for being too uniform to the point where a robot could complete it… and so, the tetchy programmer wars began.



Llamas at speed the Minter way

Personal Computer Games



PCG spoke to Paul 'That's Magic' Daniels about his love of computers and the impending release of his own piece of software, the Paul Daniels Magic Adventure released on the Atari home computers by Amazon Systems. Now that's tragic…



Sinclair User



This month *SU* featured a type-in program that stood head and shoulders above the rest for pointlessness, the ZX81 computerised knitting pattern for a woolly hat. Next month it plans to do a feature on how you can program your underpants to order a pizza… triple cheese, you say?



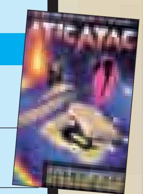
FEB 1984

BBC



1 The Hobbit (Melbourne House)
2 Saloon Sally (Psion)
3 Mr Men (Mirrorsoft)
4 Snapper (Acornsoft)
5 Philosopher's Quest (Acornsoft)

SPECTRUM



1 Atic Atac (Ultimate)
2 Lunar Jetman (Ultimate)
3 Ant Attack (Quicksilva)
4 Manic Miner (Bug Byte)
5 Valhalla (Movisoft)

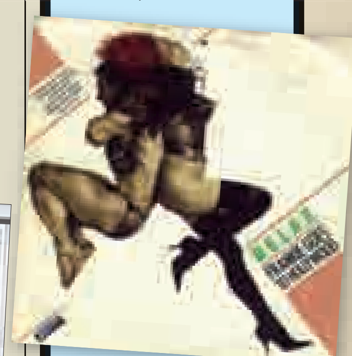
COMMODORE 64



1 Radar Rat Race (Commodore)
2 The Hobbit (Melbourne House)
3 Arcadia (Imagine)
4 Purple Turtles (Quicksilva)
5 Aquaplane (Quicksilva)

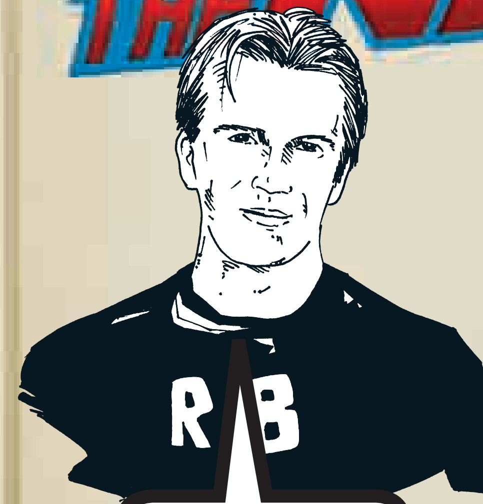
MUSIC SINGLES CHART FEB '84

1 Relax (Frankie Goes To Hollywood)
2 Radio Ga Ga (Queen)
3 Girls Just Want To Have Fun (Cyndi Lauper)
4 Break My Stride (Matthew Wilder)
5 Doctor! Doctor! (The Thompson Twins)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1990





Start your PC-Engines, US Gold throws down the Gauntlet, Ocean and Mindscape go to the movies, The Sales Curve goes SWIV and there's more Dragon's Lair than you can shake a broadsword at. Richard Burton takes a stroll through May 1990…

NEC, maker of PC-Engine, finally announced to exasperated British gamers when it would be releasing the UK version of its gaming console. It anticipated the machine would be available at the end of the summer for £99.

Whether this announcement was hastened by the fact that so many imported Japanese machines had been finding their way into the UK to be sold on the grey market, we can only speculate…

And with that news, heated debate began on whether NEC had missed the boat with the PC-Engine. The machine had been available in Japan for almost two years and was released in the US a year later. Technology and games had moved on since its Japanese release. Would PC-Engine have the pulling power and software catalogue to challenge Sega and Nintendo in the UK gaming market? Could it carve out a niche for itself? If PC-Engine's version of *R-Type* was anything to go by, it most certainly could.

US Gold was readying itself for the release of its first two console games: a conversion of the multiplayer coin-op *Gauntlet*, and a version of the 8-bit bestseller *Impossible Mission*. Both would be available on Sega Master System and being on 128K cartridges, should cram a lot more in than the home computer versions.

If you were one of the many people who loved *Paradroid* on C64 then Hewson had some trouser-wetting news for you. Hewson, under the controlling eye of Andrew Braybrook, was developing a 16-bit version of the game for Amiga and ST owners, which would be called *Paradroid 90*. The game was due to be released around the end of the summer.

The Sales Curve, responsible for the terrific *Silkworm*, announced that its year-long partnership with Virgin Mastertronic had ended and that it wouldn't be renewing the contract. The agreement with Virgin was to program arcade conversions for its label but now The Sales Curve planned to release them under its own name with two games already lined up for release. *St Dragon* was due to be released in September, along with the early development of *SWIV*, a sequel to the aforementioned *Silkworm*. Programming had barely begun on *SWIV* so an extremely tentative release date of October was announced.

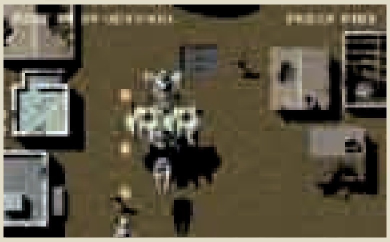
Ocean was again grabbing every last licensing opportunity available with the acquisitions of two new film tie-ins. Having got hold of the *Robocop 2* licence, it followed up with the rights to the new Schwarzenegger sci-fi flick *Total Recall*, and *Navy SEALs*, a film starring Charlie Sheen. Unfortunately, both the games turned out to be mediocre at best.

Following in Ocean's footsteps was Mindscape, which had been negotiating an impressive collection of film licensing agreements itself. Having already secured deals for *Mad Max* and *Dirty Harry*, it could add to that list *Days Of Thunder*, the Tom Cruise NASCAR racing film – another game-of-the-film that proved to be an absolute stinker on almost every format. The *Mad Max* and *Dirty Harry* games never materialised.

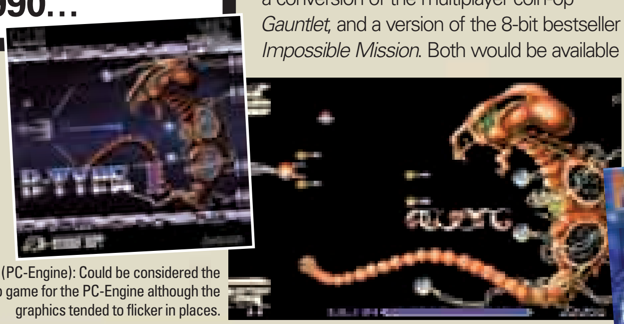
One game Ocean had already completed but didn't really know what to do with was *Head Over Heels*. Having had the completed Atari ST version successfully converted months ago and the Amiga conversion well under way, Ocean was still scratching its head about how to release the game. Should it go for the budget release or the money-grabbing



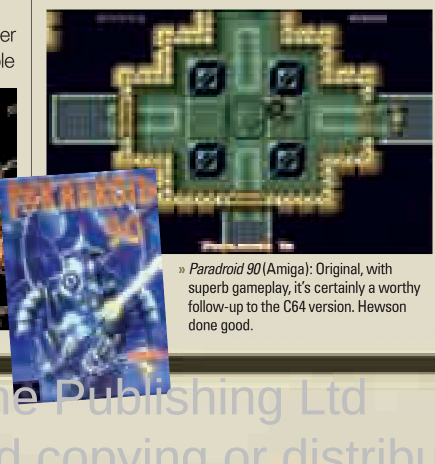
» *Gauntlet* (Sega Master System): Kill the ghosts, run like stink, get the treasure and find an exit. *Gauntlet* on SMS – top-notch.



» *SWIV* (Atari ST): This *Silkworm* sequel proves that improvements can be made on original releases. *Silkworm* was good, *SWIV* was stunning.



» *R-Type* (PC-Engine): Could be considered the flagship game for the PC-Engine although the graphics tended to flicker in places.



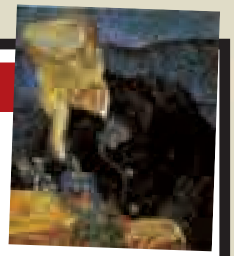
» *Paradroid 90* (Amiga): Original, with superb gameplay, it's certainly a worthy follow-up to the C64 version. Hewson done good.



» *Total Recall* (Amiga): Another Ocean movie tie-in that disappointed. Looked good, but played like a dog.

1990

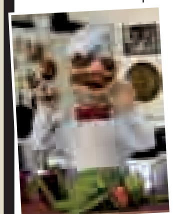
MAY NEWS



» For a mere $82.5 million this picture could be yours. If anyone knew where it actually was, of course…

22 May saw Microsoft release the latest version of its operating system Windows. The updated Windows 3.0 was widely regarded as the first truly successful version of the operating system with estimated sales of 10 million copies in the two years running up to the Window 3.1 upgrade.

A new price record was set for a painting on 15 May when Vincent Van Gogh's piece Portrait Of Doctor Gachet, sold at Christies auction house in New York for $82.5 million. The buyer, Japanese businessman Ryoei Saito, later caused uproar in the art world when he stated that he would like the picture cremated with him when he died, although he later retracted this, saying it was simply a display of affection for the artwork. Nevertheless, when Mr Saito did die in 1996, the painting and its subsequent whereabouts were shrouded in mystery. Its current location is still unknown.



» Hurty flurty schnipp schnipp, bork bork bork. The Chef has spoken…

Two high-profile celebrities passed away on 16 May. Rat Packer, Sammy Davis Junior died from complications from the throat cancer he was suffering. The same day, Jim Henson, creator of *The Muppets*, and the original voice of Kermit the Frog, died unexpectedly of pneumonia at the age of 53.

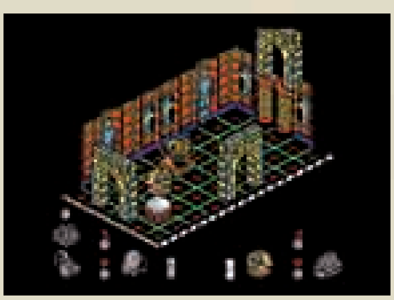


» *Days Of Thunder* (Amiga): Not only a pile of crusty drivel but also possibly one of the worst film-licensed games ever created.

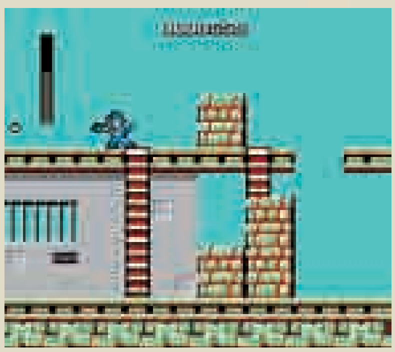
full-price version? Thankfully it was released on its budget label, The Hit Squad, making *Head Over Heels* even more of a bargain, as it was an absolute masterpiece.

If you were a fan of Don Bluth's *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*, then brace yourself for no less than four new games from the Sullivan/Bluth Studio. The forthcoming titles would be *Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp*, *Dragon's Lair: The Legend*, *Space Ace II: Borf's Revenge* and, on a completely different tangent, *Sea Beast And Barnacle Bill*. Most would be released on the 16-bit machines although *Barnacle Bill* was initially planned as a Laserdisc game.

In the world of reviews, *The Games Machine* awarded its TGM Star Player to *Infestation* (Psygnosis, Amiga), *Cloud*



» *Head Over Heels* (Amiga): Cracking on Amstrad, great on Spectrum and good on C64. The trend continued…



» *Mega Man* (NES): Pleasant 2D-platform scroller but not a patch on *Mario*. Called *Rockman* in Japan.

Kingdoms (Logotron, Amiga/C64), *Track & Field II* (Konami, NES), *Midwinter* (Rainbird, Atari ST) and *Mega Man* (Capcom, NES).

Even though it was a mainly console and 16-bit era for gaming, a few 8-bit games muscled their way into contention with titles like *Turrican* (Rainbow Arts, Amiga/C64), *Castle Master* (Incentive/Domark, C64/Spectrum/Amiga/ST) and *Crackdown* (US Gold, Spectrum/C64).

ACE ran its complicated reviewing rule, complete with the Predicted Interest Curve analysis, resulting in its Ace Rated games being *Harpoon* (Mirrorsoft/PSS, PC), *Knights Of The Crystallion* (US Gold, Amiga), *Midwinter* (Rainbird, Atari ST), *Lifeforce* (Konami, NES) and *Klax* (Tengen/Domark, Atari ST)

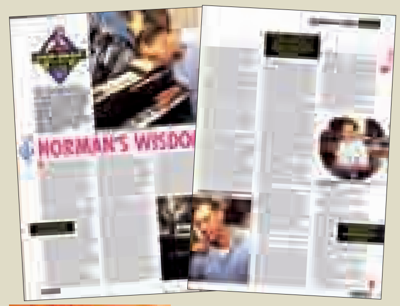
C&VG stamped its C&VG Hit award on a feast of gaming this month with no less than 11 games attaining the hallowed status, these included *Hammerfist* (Vivid Image, C64/Amiga), *Dynasty Wars* (US Gold, Atari ST), *Turrican* (Rainbow Arts, C64), *Klax* (Tengen/Domark, Atari ST) and *Castle Master* (Incentive/Domark, Atari ST), with the console contingent kept happy with *Curse* (Micronet, Mega Drive), *Super Real Basketball* (Sega, Mega Drive) and *The New Zealand Story* (Taito, PC-Engine).

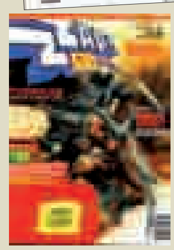
THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS



ZERO

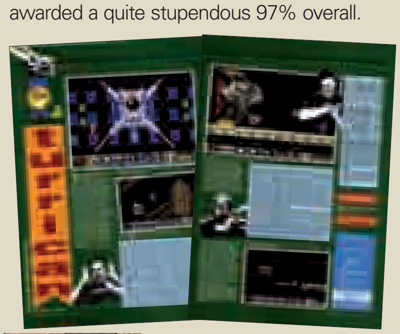
With a nod toward MIDI music made on 16-bit machines, *Zero* interviewed Norman Cook, in the days before Zoë Ball and Fat Boy Slim. You would think he'd love computers wouldn't you? Nope. "I found Scalextric instantly more gratifying than the computer," said the former The Housemartins member. Oh dear.

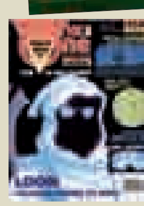




ZZAP!64

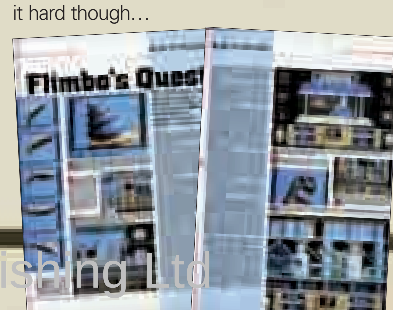
The old girl of C64 gaming hit issue 61 and was still going strong, with a corking selection of games reviewed this month. The Gold Medal-winning game that got the reviewers excited was *Turrican* by Rainbow Arts, which was awarded a quite stupendous 97% overall.





THE ONE

Among the reviews and previews, one that shone out above the others was for *Spindizzy II*, later renamed *Spindizzy Worlds*. Paul Shirley's original 8-bit classic debuted on Amstrad CPC and was a raging success, proving that the formula could be recreated on 16-bit machines too. Man, was it hard though…

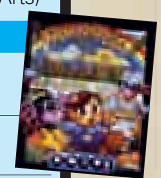


MAY 1990



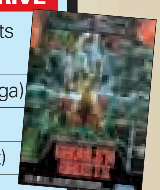
AMIGA

1 TV Sports Basketball (Mirrorsoft)
2 Italia 1990 (Codemasters)
3 Supercars (Gremlin Graphics)
4 Manchester United (Krisalis)
5 X-Out (Rainbow Arts)



ATARI ST

1 Rainbow Islands (Ocean)
2 Italia 1990 (Codemasters)
3 Supercars (Gremlin Graphics)
4 Advanced Ski Simulator (Codemasters)
5 Operation Thunderbolt (Ocean)

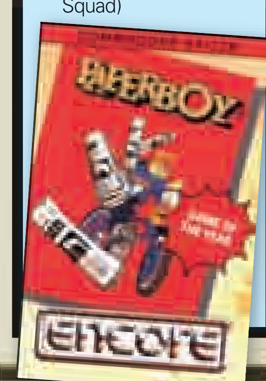


SEGA MEGA DRIVE

1 Ghouls 'N Ghosts (Capcom/Sega)
2 Golden Axe (Sega)
3 Tatsujin (Sega)
4 Curse (Micronet)
5 Herzog Zwei (Technosoft)

COMMODORE 64

1 Paperboy (Encore)
2 Buggy Boy (Encore)
3 Ikari Warriors (Encore)
4 Rainbow Islands (Ocean)
5 Combat School (Hit Squad)





EXPRESS RAIDER

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST



- **PUBLISHER:** US GOLD
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** CPC
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

Here's an arcade port that, as a nipper, I would shamefully crank down to the easiest setting. However, despite demonstrating such blatant cowardice in the face of the great train robbery, I would still find myself continually looting its worthless Game Over screen.

I remember *Express Raider* having a peculiar playable-intro which, in hindsight, makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. While waiting for the express train to leave the station, your cowboy stands patiently beside the part of the carriage which, in about 20 second's time, he's going to have to fight to reach. During this time he is set upon by one cowboy and a pack of coyotes that are incapable of inflicting any damage. You can punch the rabid beasts in the face if you wish, jump over them if you feel the urge or simply stand there and watch them run towards you like obedient pets. It makes no odds, because each option yields the same results.

The main section of the game finds you fighting your way to the front of a train that houses Stetson wearers that don't want you to get there. The first part finds you ducking punches and bullets until you're in a position that you can comfortably punch them in the love bags. The second finds you testing your riding and quick-draw mettle in a frantic horse-powered train chase. Here you must take out villains with a timely bullet and avoid hurting the damsels that hold out bags of sacrificial cash.

Express Raider is also the only game (that I can recall) that asks you to share an energy bar with your enemies. While that may seem peculiar, it works surprisingly well. The faster you punch an enemy the quicker their side of the bar fills up, and vice versa. It makes for some frantic fisticuffs as you try to pummel sprites with a barrage of attacks before they get in first.

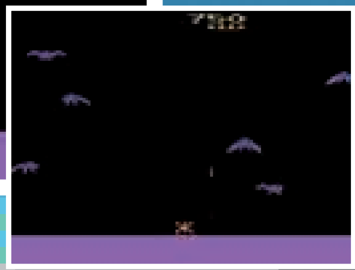
After replaying the game, I can't actually determine what it was I found so difficult. I can walk the entire thing with my eyes closed now, and on rare occasions finish it on the hardest setting without losing a life. Now if I could only say the same thing about the thousands of other Amstrad games of which I've only ever seen the first level.



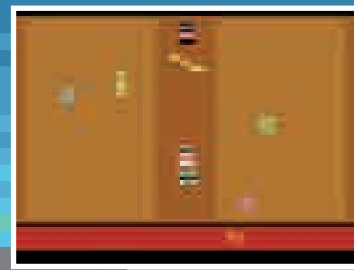
TOP 25 ATARI 2600 GAMES

Darran and Stuart are back again with another definitive list, but this time it's dedicated to one of gaming's earliest consoles, the Atari 2600. So join the intrepid pair as they blow the dust off several cartridges, plug in their paddles and joypads and look at the very best that Atari's machine has to offer









Phoenix

■ **Year:** 1983

■ **Publisher:** Atari

25 **Considering the basic architecture of the console, the Atari 2600 was able to churn out some surprisingly faithful arcade conversions, as the rather wonderful *Phoenix* proved.**

Not only did Atari do a brilliant job of capturing the spirit of the original arcade hit, it also ensured that all the levels were present and correct as well, meaning there's a fair amount of variety to be found as your X-wing fighter (well that's what it looks like) shoots down a variety of distinctive alien waves.

Far slicker than *Galaxian* and filled with plenty of nice little touches – pressing down activates your shield – *Phoenix* is the perfect way to kick off our top 25 and proves that faithful arcade conversions were actually possible on the 2600. They just needed a talented coder.

Combat

■ **Year:** 1977

■ **Publisher:** Atari

24 **Sometimes it's the simplistic games that work the best. *Pong*, *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* are all considered timeless classics, and all are incredibly easy to get to grips with. Surely this can't be a coincidence?**

Combat, may be one of the earliest and most basic of the Atari 2600's releases, but don't let that put you off, as underneath its Lego-like surface beats one hell of an addictive game. A game for two players, *Combat*'s premise is laughably simple, yet hellishly addictive – you and your opponent simply face off against each other on opposite sides of the screen and have to shoot each other down as many times as possible.

With its huge range of game modes – 'Tank Pong' is superb – *Combat* proves that you don't need fancy visuals to create a great game.

Raiders Of The Lost Ark

■ **Year:** 1982

■ **Publisher:** Atari

23 **While it can't hope to better the simple majesty of *Adventure*, Howard Scott Warshaw's take on the hit Steven Spielberg film still managed to turn heads when it was first released.**

Granted, it's not the most accessible of adventures to start with and if you don't use the instruction manual it can take a very long time to work out what to do, but once everything clicks together you'll find a solid adventure with some deft touches – the left controller manages your inventory, while the right moves Indy – that require plenty of cunning and joystick dexterity to complete. There's even a fairly nifty rendition of the *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* theme tune to enjoy. A very solid and entertaining adventure.

Frostbite

■ **Year:** 1983

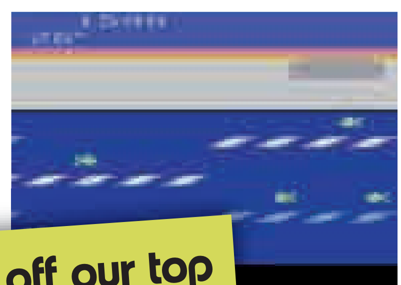
■ **Publisher:** Activision

22 **Write *Frostbite* off as just another *Frogger* rip-off and it's obvious that you've not spent any real time with Activision's game.** While it obviously borrows heavily from the cult coin-op there's plenty of neat mechanics that allow the platformer to stand proudly on its own two feet.

Tasked with building himself an igloo, your Eskimo had to leap backwards and forwards across four sets of ice floes (landing on a floe automatically built a block of your igloo) complete your igloo and progress to the next stage.

While birds, crabs and other aquatic menaces tried to push you off the floes, it was possible to reverse their direction and hopefully avoid a watery death. With its tight controls and even tighter time limit, *Frostbite* successfully emulates the arcade hits of old and proves to be frightfully addictive stuff.





"Phoenix is the perfect way to kick off our top 25 and proves that faithful arcade conversions were actually possible on the Atari 2600. They just needed a talented coder"

TOP 25 ATARI 2600 GAMES



Enduro

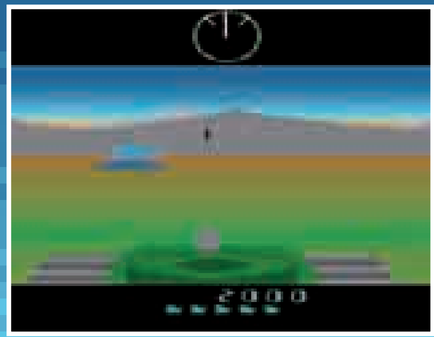
■ **Year:** 1983

■ **Publisher:** Activision

21 **While the 2600 version of *Pole Position* did a fairly good job at emulating its arcade parent, it looked incredibly sluggish and basic next to the mighty *Enduro*.** Although its graphics are nothing to write home about – the landscape is virtually barren with just a few tiny mountains in the background – it was the entertaining gameplay that made Activision's racer so special.

Each day you're required to pass a certain number of cars in order to progress, and later levels became a desperate race against the rising sun that saw you frantically weaving your way through the dense traffic. As your advancement continues, day turns to night (and opponents become little more than scary blips of light) and you'll eventually start to battle against elements like rain and snow, which subsequently impacts on your car's handling. It's all extremely clever stuff and is arguably the 2600's best racer. Just don't tell *Pole Position*.







Battlezone

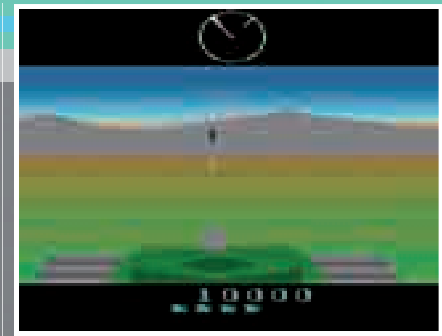
■ **Year:** 1983

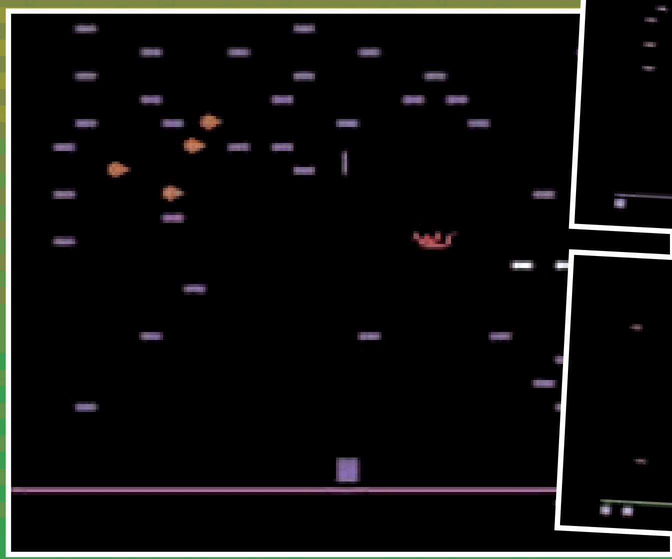
■ **Publisher:** Atari

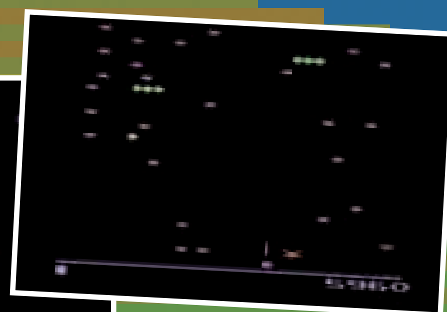
20 **Atari's 2600 conversion of *Battlezone* may lack the wire-framed elegance of its arcade parent, but don't let that put you off.** This is a resoundingly solid effort that captures the cat-and-mouse spirit of the original game perfectly. Well it would do if all the obstacles you could hide behind in the original arcade game had been included. Doh.

Worry not though, for while the lack of cover does take away an important element of *Battlezone*, the end result is no less intense and actually makes for an incredibly exciting experience. Wheeling around in your huge tank and trying to take out an enemy is far more exciting, due to the fact that he could turn at any time and take his own shot at you. Of course, it is possible to steer out of the way of the enemy bullets, but the sparse landscape means there's very little chance of escape, therefore ensuring that the action remains constantly fast and furious.

Ok, so Battlezone is far from perfect, but it offers plenty of bang for your buck and is still brilliant fun to play. That's good enough for us.









Centipede

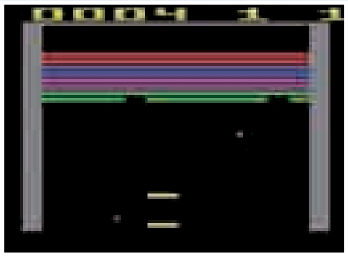
■ **Year:** 1982

■ **Publisher:** Atari

19 **There is no way that *Centipede* should possibly work on the Atari 2600. The arcade hit boasts insanely fast visuals and requires an incredibly precise trackball in order to get the most out of it, and the 2600 features neither.** Nevertheless, if you can put aside the initially skittish controls, headache-inducing flickering and block-like visuals this is a surprisingly authentic blaster that provides hours of entertainment.

It certainly takes a while to master those twitchy controls, but once you've managed to get your craft under control you'll find the Atari 2600 *Centipede* to be just as addictive as Ed Logg and Dona Bailey's original classic. The action throughout is furious and relentlessly unceasing, sound effects are surprisingly authentic, and while there are only two different game modes to choose from, the addictive nature of the game more than makes up for it. A solid blaster that shoots first and asks questions later.

> **"If you can put aside the skittish controls, headache-inducing flickering and block-like visuals this is a surprisingly authentic blaster that gives hours of entertainment"**





Super Breakout

■ **Year:** 1978

■ **Publisher:** Atari

18

We've said countless times in Retro Gamer that the simplest concepts often make for the best games, and here's yet another example to add to our ever-growing list. Played with the Atari 2600's paddle, *Super Breakout* presents you with a colourful wall that has to be knocked down, one brick at time. Depending on how you hit the returning ball will depend on its subsequent speed and trajectory and as the wall diminishes, the ball gets faster and faster.

There are no power-ups for you to pick up here, so don't expect to see any icons dropping down that extend your bat or grant you multiple balls. It's just a paddle, a wall, a ball and your reflexes. Nothing more and nothing less. Sure there are some fun options that grant you dual bats and the chance to free extra balls, but regardless of what option you choose the end result is always the same. A great game that requires skill and plenty of it.







Seaquest

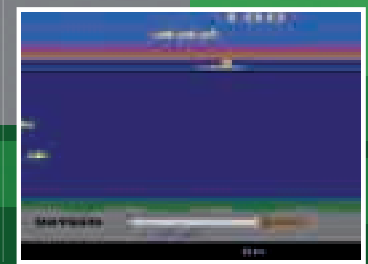
■ **Year:** 1983

■ **Publisher:** Activision

17

Despite possessing the agility of an iron girder, there have been countless twitch games centred on the good ol' submarine: *Dive-Dive-Dive, In the Hunt,* and thanks to Activision the 2600 can also join these denizens. Taking control of a sprightly sub, it's your quest to salvage an army of divers that are caught up in some heavy underwater traffic. You have to blast enemy subs and sharks capable of ripping through steel, while keeping a tentative eye on your gradually waning oxygen. When you've collected enough divers you have to resurface, disembowel and repeat the whole process until the scoreboard explodes.

Graphically, the game is pretty slick. All the enemies are instantly distinguishable and the collision detection is bang on the money (handy, as later stages get incredibly tricky to negotiate). Sadly, because the entire game is split over one entire screen, the game can become a tad repetitive. It's also ridiculously easy as the game likes to dish out extra lives like Subway vouchers. You'll easily be







Solaris

■ **Year:** 1986

■ **Publisher:** Atari

16

As a technical showcase, Doug Neubauer's *Solaris* can be heralded as one of the finest pieces of code written for the 2600. As a game, however, it's as mad as a hatter. You're on a perilous mission to find the mysterious planet Solaris. On your journey you'll blast waves of Martians, steer your ship into beautifully drawn planets, dock for repair, warp to various quadrants, rescue some spacemen, have your controls go smacky, see your ship clone itself for no reason and collect keys while darting down a space corridor laden with enemies. The game is staggeringly colourful and exhilaratingly quick to boot. Your little ship moves across the screen at speed and aiming can be done using a handy radar that sits at the foot of the screen. Impressively, with so much going on, the graphics will rarely flicker or dissolve. *Solaris* is an extremely challenging shooter that boasts some staggering visuals, and while its frenetic gameplay will certainly take some getting used to, it's certainly a stellar and ambitious showpiece from Atari.

TOP 25 ATARI 2600 GAMES







Space Invaders

■ **Year:** 1978

■ **Publisher:** Atari

14

Considering the blissful simplicity of the coin-op original you'd think that a game like *Space Invaders* would be easy to port to the Atari 2600, and it was. Sort of…

While this was nowhere near arcade perfect – there are only 36 invaders instead of the original 55, one of the defence bunkers is AWOL and it's far more simplistic to play – *Space Invaders* on the Atari 2600 is still an excellent shooter that's hellishly addictive to play.

Although it bears little physical similarity to Taito's arcade game, the basic nature is still in place, and best of all, a staggering amount of different game modes are included – 112 in total. Quite a staggering achievement considering most games of the time managed to fit around 4 to 30 different options on the cartridge.

Moving shields, zig-zagging bullets, guided bullets, a variety of different two-player modes, invisible aliens; the range of different gameplay modes is seemingly endless and will keep you playing forever. The Atari 2600 may not have been able to successfully emulate its arcade peer, but its vast amount of options arguably made it just as good a game. It's hardly surprising that it went on to become one of the machine's most successful releases. A must-have cartridge if you're into your shoot-'em-ups.

Ms Pac-Man

■ **Year:** 1982

■ **Publisher:** Atari

15

After the mess that was *Pac-Man* on the 2600, it's great to see that Atari managed to get everything right for the sequel. To be fair, if we had the alleged six-week programming time that *Pac-Man*'s developers had, we'd have turned out a load of old rubbish as well.

While it's far from arcade perfect – the ghost patterns aren't quite right, there are no intermissions and the visuals are far cruder – this is still a brilliant conversion. Every single maze from the original arcade version is present and correct, it's possible to change the number of ghosts that chase you and it plays like a proverbial dream. In fact, it's the controls that are arguably one of the most impressive aspects of *Ms Pac-Man*.

While the original *Pac-Man* seemed to move around at a whim, taking ages to respond to your joystick movements, *Ms Pac-Man* was a very different experience and the yellow minx could be steered with amazing precision. You could argue that the constant flickering of the ghosts was annoying, but it's a small price to pay for such a classy conversion.



"Full of character and impressive to look at, Keystone Kapers is a breezy platformer that constantly entertains"

Demon Attack

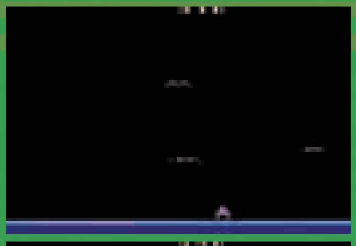
■ **Year:** 1982

■ **Publisher:** Imagic

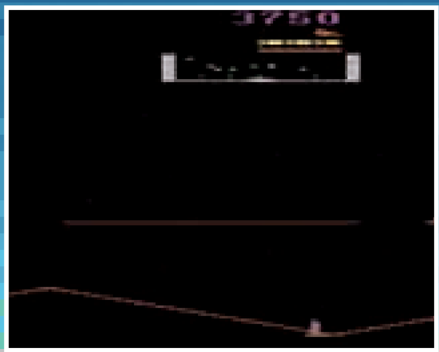
13

For those familiar with the Amstar arcade game *Phoenix*, this horizontally fixed shmup, by Rob Fulop, will seem familiar. Taking the controls of a laser cannon, it was your mission to protect planet Krybor by blowing the sprite out of any intergalactic demon birds that braved hovering above your turret. Unlike *Phoenix*, poor 2600 owners got no mother ship screen to vent their frustration on, just wave after wave of jittery winged cannon fodder. The difficulty of *Demon Attack* is taxing at best, especially during the later stages, where shooting at enemies will cause them to break off into smaller, more nimble birds. *Demon Attack* found a release on the Intellivision and the Odyssey and was the focus of some heated legal wrangling between Atari and Imagic. Atari had purchased the home videogame rights for *Phoenix* and disputed that *Demon Attack* shared a few uncanny similarities. The case was settled out of court Ron Burgundy-style with 2600 paddles, bike chains and much staring.













Defender II

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Publisher:** Atari

12

After the bitter disappointment that was 2600 *Defender*, Atari managed to get everything right with this far superior sequel. What impresses us most with Bill Aspromonte's wonderful sequel is just how slick it actually is. Everything moves along at a tremendously smooth rate, and the action never lets up for a second. It certainly takes a while to get used to your craft's handling but once you do you'll be flying over the alien landscape with ease, and taking down enemies with a simple flick from your laser. Granted the graphics and sound are hardly going to win any awards, but if you're looking for an incredibly slick shoot-'em-up that boasts plenty of replay value then *Defender II* can't really be beat. A solid port that captures all the fun and excitement of the arcade original.

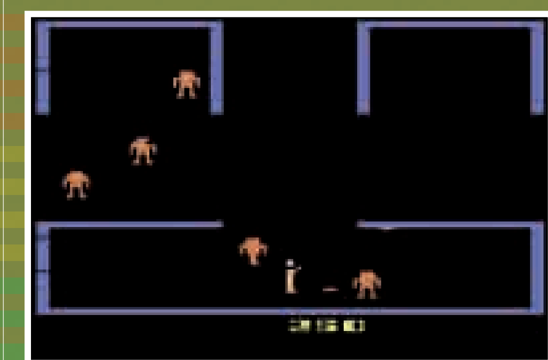
Berzerk

■ **Year:** 1982

■ **Publisher:** Atari

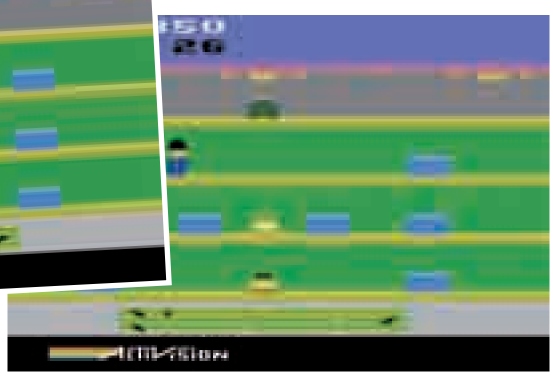
10

This is the game that Eugene Jarvis found inspiration for his run-'n'-gun classic *Robotron: 2084*. It is, in our opinion, the best run-'n'-gun on the Atari 2600. Based on the arcade game of the same name, you play a fugitive trying to escape pretty much the most dangerous environment imaginable – an electrified maze teeming with an army of cyclopic robots. Cripes! Despite not really being much to gawp at, the animations in *Berzerk* are splendid; the robot's whirling eye graphics were menacing and really instilled a feeling that they're scanning the room for a fleshy to kill. The AI is also brilliantly naff because you can fry the dopey droids by drawing them into the electrified walls. Helping to keep the action at a fast pace is Evil Otto, a smiling ball graphic that will chase you around the screen until you eventually make an exit. While the arcade version of *Berzerk* was infamous for 1) appearing in the titles of the film *Crank*, and 2) for making Otto indestructible, the 2600 port allowed the player to blow up the jubilant ball of death, making the game a shade more forgiving and not driving *you* berserk.









Keystone Kapers

■ **Year:** 1983

■ **Publisher:** Activision

11

Activision made some wonderfully slick 2600 titles back in the day, and *Keystone Kapers* is another fine example of the company's brilliance and a superb platformer in its own right. Taking on the role of a copper, your aim is to simply chase down a prisoner and bring him to justice. It's a fairly straightforward chase but is given depth by having the action take place on four separate levels. And surprisingly, the prisoner always has a head start on you.

Fortunately your copper has been working out, as the boy in blue is able to run along at a fairly nippy pace and can jump over any objects that get in his way. While there are elevators at the end of each platform, there are also three lifts that can be used to hopefully get the drop on the escaping crook. Best not dilly-dally though, as the constantly decreasing time limit (which drops quicker should you hit certain obstacles) ensures that you're constantly on the move.

Full of character and impressive to look at, *Keystone Kapers* is a wonderfully breezy platformer that constantly manages to entertain. Another direct hit from Activision.



TOP 25 ATARI 2600 GAMES



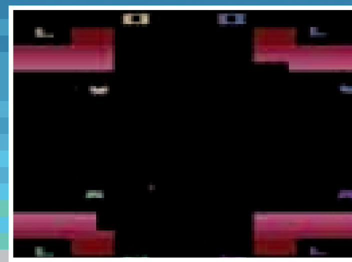
Kaboom!

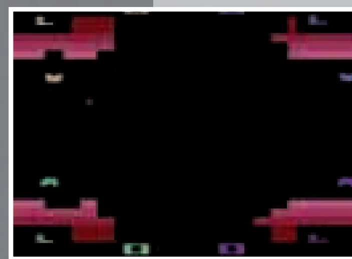
■ **Year:** 1981

■ **Publisher:** Activision

9 **This excellent twitch game from Activision – loosely based on the Atari arcade game *Avalanche* – is basically the polar opposite of a shoot-'em-up.** Rather than avoiding danger; you literally had to try to catch it. Using the paddle peripheral, you had to use buckets of water to sweep up bombs that were dropped by the 'Mad Bomber'. What makes this game somewhat peculiar is that the more lives you lost; the harder the game became. Starting out with three buckets all piled on top of each other; every time you fumbled, a bucket would be docked from your pile, shrinking your avatar and so making your job much harder. *Kaboom!* also happens to be an annoyingly hypnotic experience. After the first few waves the game cranks up the speed until you're blissfully aware that your subconscious has booted you off the paddle and is playing the game for you.







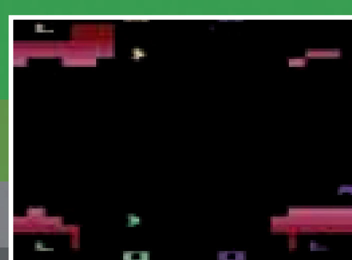
Warlords

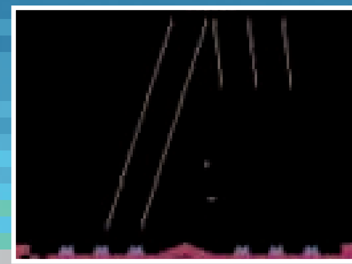
■ **Year:** 1981

■ **Publisher:** Atari

8 **This four player version of *Breakout* is arguably the finest experience that you can have with four people and an Atari 2600.** It is ridiculously simple, wonderfully playable and is blessed with some fantastic computer AI – so even the friend-lacking gamer out there can sample its charms. Basically, each player takes control of a 'knight' and must protect their rampart from a hot potato using the power of deflection.

Warlords is simply a last-settlement-standing-wins affair, and that's basically that. The joy of this game is that you can catch the ball, if you wish, and aim it at whichever friend is currently in the lead, this means you can unfairly team up against mates and bully them out of the game – which causes all sorts of enjoyment (although not usually for the subjected party, mind). Despite suffering from some rather questionable physics – your ball will occasionally fire off in directions that will have you scratching your head in confusion – the action is frantic and the game is, without doubt, a multiplayer classic.



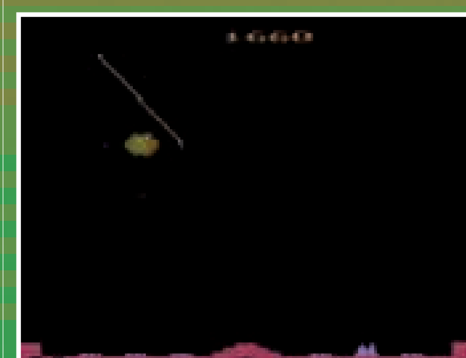


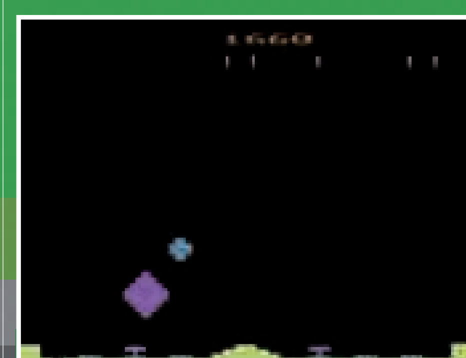
Missile Command

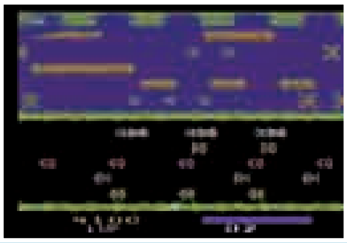
■ **Year:** 1981

■ **Publisher:** Atari

7 **Where arcade conversions like *Pac-Man* failed miserably on the 2600, *Missile Command* didn't. It hit its desired target to become a truly astonishing port of Atari's base-defending classic.** There is, as you'd expect, some scaling down to be found. For starters, you only get one base to protect, as opposed to the original three, some of the enemies appear to be taking a vacation and there are also limits to the number of missiles you can fire simultaneously. This version does boast remarkably tight collision detection (which is the most paramount aspect of this game), and adorable-looking mushroom clouds to coo over. Overall, it's a very decent conversion that's only let down by a lack of trackball support.









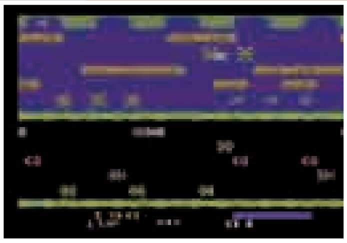
Frogger

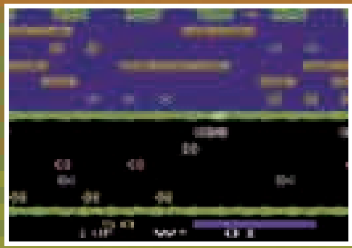
Year: 1982

Publisher: Starpath

6 **With no scrolling to contend with, the 2600 was always going to be in a great position to take on Konami's riveting traffic-dodging classic.** And take it on it does, like a frog to water you might say (as ironic as that would be). *Frogger*'s appearance on the 2600 would prove so popular that two versions of the game would eventually find a release on the 2600: the Parker Bros edition and Starpath's 'official' version.

Both iterations are fantastic and both include a forgiving *Pac-Man* physic that allows you to reach the edge of a screen and re-materialise on the opposite side without losing a life. Despite the Parker's port packing a neat 'Fast Frogger' mode, we have to hand the accolade for the best version to Starpath's iteration of the game. If you're lucky enough to ever locate a copy (you'll probably find one stuffed in Jimmy Hoffa's suit jacket) eye-watering visuals, that look astonishingly similar to the arcade original, will be your reward.



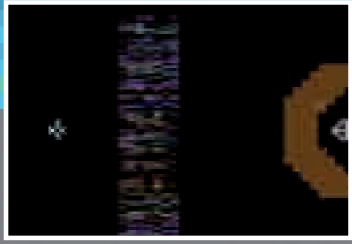


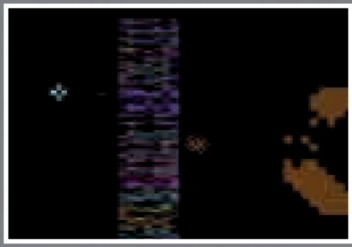
Yars' Revenge

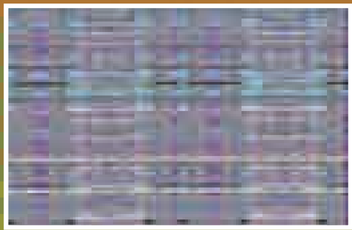
Year: 1981

Publisher: Atari

5 **When we selected the truly shambolic *ET* to feature as our Retro Shamer in issue 44 we came under heavy fire for calling the game pants.** Just to reiterate, the entire game is about falling into black holes to rebuild a telephone. Anyway, let's brush that horrible little alien turd aside for a moment to talk about a real game, the awesome *Yars' Revenge*. Howard's perennial shoot-'em-up is a real showcase of his talents. *Yars' Revenge* shows him summoning some pretty impressive powers from the humble Atari 2600. Notable mentions include the seismic, screen-swallowing explosions and the hypnotic rotating shield that guards your target. Widely loved, and deservedly so, *Yars' Revenge* is a fantastically atmospheric shoot-'em-up that's annoyingly addictive. And thanks to the sporadic nature of the swirling Qotile and that bloody homing bullet that followed you around like a bad smell, it emits one of the most nail-biting experiences on the 2600. It's an absolute must-have for any 2600 collection.







Adventure

Year: 1978

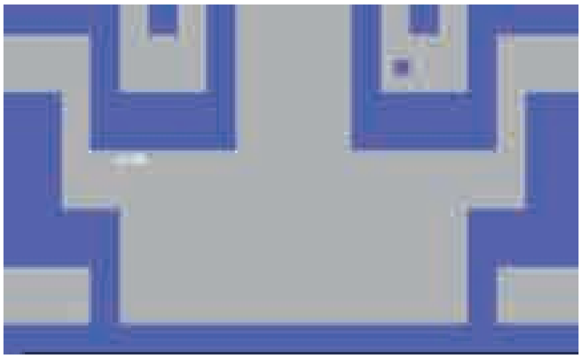
Publisher: Atari

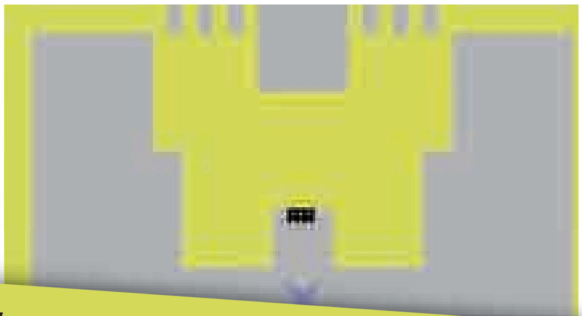
4 **It's easy to write off Warren Robinett's *Adventure*.** With its crude visuals (your hero is nothing more than a square block), simplistic sound effects and dull-sounding premise – retrieve a missing chalice and return it to your castle – it sounds like one of the most pointless games ever conceived. This of course is completely naïve, as beneath its ancient-looking exterior is a surprisingly complex arcade adventure, the very first arcade adventure, in fact.

Loosely based on the popular text game *Colossal Cave Adventure*, Robinett's *Adventure* is a triumph of design over visuals. As you guide your square, sorry, knight around the surrounding countryside you'll find yourself chased by dragons (which look alarmingly like ducks), pestered by thieving bats and negotiating complex mazes, often in the dark. Eventually you'll discover the treasured chalice and must return it to your castle.

While game one on the cartridge is a ridiculously cut-down version of the main adventure, the real meat of *Adventure* is found on modes two (the main game) and three.

The challenge steps up a gear and with three dragons to battle, a variety of different castles to visit and several mazes to solve, it is going to take some time before you solve Robinett's entertaining quest. Even when you've completed *Adventure* it never truly ends, because the final mode randomly places items throughout the game world, meaning that no two adventures will ever be the same. Okay, so sometimes the gold key will generate in the gold castle (making it impossible to complete) but hey, that's what the reset button is for.





"Even when you've completed Adventure it never truly ends, because the final mode randomly places items throughout the game world, meaning that no two adventures will ever be the same"

TOP 25 ATARI 2600 GAMES





River Raid

■ **Year:** 1982

■ **Publisher:** Activision

3

We've covered a great many shooters in this month's top 25, but this incredible effort from Carol Shaw is arguably the best of the lot and thoroughly deserves its place in the top three.

Sitting at the controls of a plane, you're required to travel up the constantly scrolling river and destroy the many enemy craft that inhabit it. Ships, helicopters and fighter jets are just a few of the obstacles that get in your way, and as you continue up the never-ending river everything just gets tougher and tougher. *River Raid* is a constant battle and it's one that never becomes boring, mainly because there's just so much to see and do.

Despite the limitations of the machine, Shaw created an impressive-looking game that featured exceptionally smooth-scrolling, surprisingly detailed scenery and an amazing amount of objects to blow up.

It wasn't just the visuals that were polished though, as Shaw had honed the gameplay until it shone. As your plane fought its way up the river its fuel would steadily deplete. Fortunately, fuel drums were plentiful and flying over them would gradually increase your fuel. What's interesting here though is that Shaw gave you a choice: either collect that fuel in order to continue your frantic journey, or shoot it down for points. It sounds like a no-brainer but when you consider that destroying fuel barrels granted you more points than helicopters and ships, it suddenly brought a whole new level of strategy to *River Raid*. Did you go for the easy points and hope that you'd reach a new fuel pod in time – as the level progressed they became scarcer and scarcer – or did you simply play it safe and try to travel as far as possible.

Of course, if you opted for the latter, your task was no less difficult, as the further you travelled the trickier the river became to traverse. While you initially started off across a huge expanse of water, it soon breaks up into narrow tributaries that become exceedingly tough to navigate. Add in that said tributaries often had enemy craft lying in wait for you and the task became even harder. Thank goodness then that collision detection throughout is spot-on and allows you to squeeze through even the tightest of gaps.



H.E.R.O.

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Publisher:** Activision

2

Aunt May swears by them, Bonnie Tyler was holding out for one, while Enrique Iglesias just wanted to be one. Activision, however, actually made a hero and he went on to star in one of the Atari 2600's greatest games.

Mixing precise control with exploration and the odd bit of shooting, John Van Ryzin's *H.E.R.O.* skilfully mixed together a concoction of different ideas to create a truly outstanding release. Taking control of Roderick Hero, a jet-pack-equipped rescuer, you had to search the caverns of Mount Leone and rescue the miners trapped within. Things are never easy though and cave-ins and a variety of dangerous animals mean that you'll need all your wits about you if you're to reach the final stages.

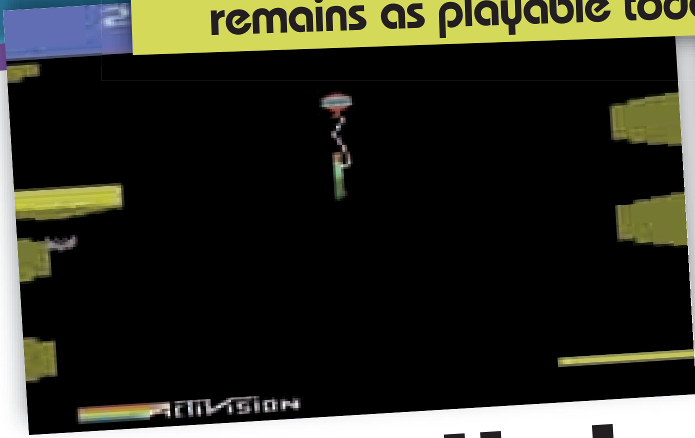
While the huge caverns are filled with all manner of hazards, Roderick Hero is far from defenceless and has a number of handy items that make negotiating the maze-like caves far easier. As well as a handy gyro-copter, Roderick also has access to a deadly laser as well as a limited supply of dynamite. Throwing down a stick of dynamite allows you to break through some of the cavern's smaller walls (careful you don't get caught in the blast though) while the laser is great for taking care of the many small creatures that get in your way. Should you run out of explosives the laser can also be used to destroy walls, but be warned, it takes a fair amount of time to do so.

And time is one thing you don't have a lot of, as your power supply is constantly falling. Therefore, it becomes a race against time to negotiate the cleverly designed caverns and rescue the poor souls as quickly as possible. Although the controls take a while to get used to, once you've sussed them you'll be negotiating the caverns with ease, and considering later stages feature volcanic rock that is deadly to the touch, you're going to need all your skills in order to reach the final stages.

Beautifully designed, with bold, detailed visuals and solid sound effects, *H.E.R.O.* is the game that just keeps on giving. It's rumoured that *H.E.R.O.* failed to sell as many copies as previous Activision titles due to it being released the same year as the videogame crash. Hopefully, if you've never experienced Ryzin's excellent game before, this article will persuade you to hunt it down and discover it for yourself.



"As good as the original was, Pitfall II pushed the envelope further and delivered a game that remains as playable today as it ever was"





Pitfall II: Lost Caverns

■ **Year:** 1983
■ **Publisher:** Activision

I So here we are then. It's the number one spot, the numero uno, the big cheese, the mac daddy (damn, now we're just getting hungry). It's certainly not been easy reaching our final decision and no doubt there will be many Atari 2600 fans out there who will vehemently disagree with us, but try as we might we couldn't think of a more deserving winner than David Crane's stupendous *Pitfall!* sequel.

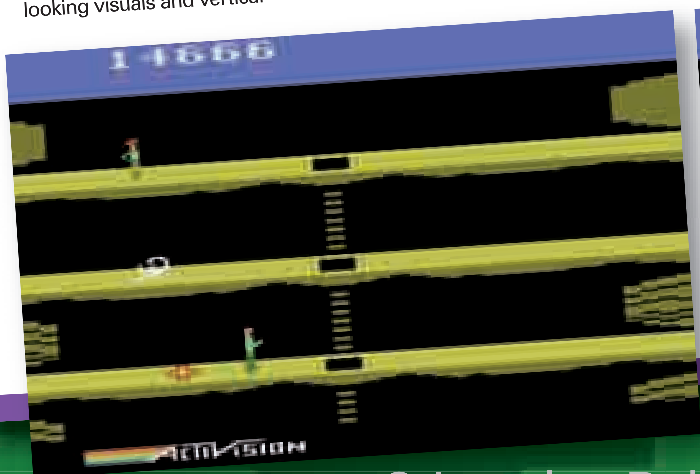
Everything about *Pitfall II* just oozes quality. Technically outstanding, *Pitfall II* virtually blew away every 2600 game that had been released before it and remains a surprisingly robust platformer. Hardly surprising really as each cartridge came fitted with its own unique circuitry, known as the Display Processor Chip (or DPC). Not only did Activison's chip enable four-channel music, it also allowed for some truly impressive-looking visuals and vertical scrolling, something that didn't feature in the original game.

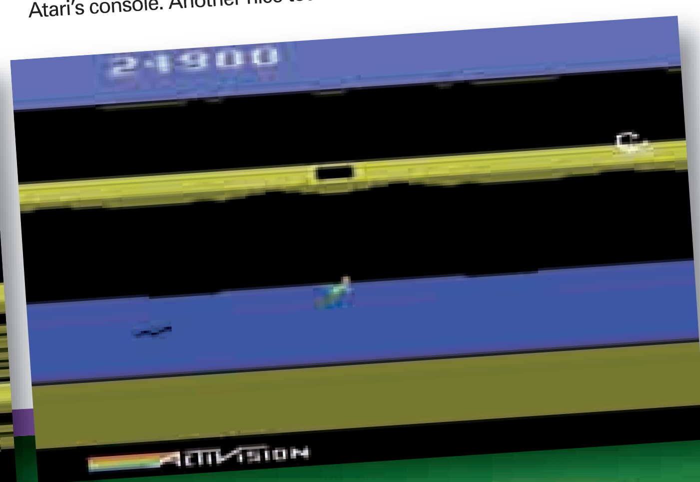
Enhanced graphics, and a unique chip weren't the only differences to be found in the two games, as Crane ensured that *Pitfall II* was a far grander experience than its impressive predecessor. While the loss of crocs, snakes, quicksand and tar pits annoyed many, there was no denying that the sequel retained the *Pitfall!* spirit, and then some.

Whereas *Pitfall!* simply required you to recover 32 bars of gold within a strict 20-minute time limit and gave you three lives in which to do so, *Pitfall II* was a far more ambitious adventure that pushed the 2600 further than any other game. As well as recovering the Raj diamond, Pitfall Harry also needs to rescue his missing niece and his cowardly pet cat. Interestingly, Quickclaw (the cat) can actually be seen on the very first screen, but you're going to have to negotiate an amazing set of devious traps and obstacles in order to finally reach him. Although the famous *Pitfall!* snakes and crocodiles were nowhere to be seen, there were still plenty of dangerous animals to be found in the lost caverns. Bats, condors, poisonous frogs and electric eels were just a few of the beasts you had to bypass and while a touch was no longer fatal – you didn't have lives – they were still best avoided. A brush with any enemy would not only rob precious points off you, it would also send you back to the very beginning of the game, or if you had progressed far enough, the last red cross – essentially a checkpoint – that you had run over.

Other new additions to the original *Pitfall!* gameplay included Harry's new-found ability to swim and a handy hot-air balloon that could be used to reach the top of the cavern. He even had a new climbing animation for when he was descending ladders. Along with those greatly improved visuals, expanded environment and additional beasties *Pitfall II* now had a catchy tune that played throughout the game, a rarity on Atari's console. Another nice touch was that the music would change depending on Pitfall Harry's circumstances. The usual jaunty tune would kick in at the start of the game or when Harry picked up a gold block, only to take on a more sombre tone when he was hit by an enemy and was sent back to a checkpoint.

For all its new ideas and additions, it's the gameplay that makes Crane's sequel such an enduring classic. As good as the original was, *Pitfall II* pushed the envelope further and delivered a game that remains as playable today as it ever was. Difficulty is finely honed, progression is well handled and the lack of a timer means you can actually explore your surroundings instead of rushing through and making a fatal mistake. *Pitfall II* may well be a technical achievement but that alone doesn't make a game great, it needs many other ingredients. Luckily, Crane knew just what those ingredients were and by mixing them all together he was able to create what is arguably the Atari 2600's finest moment.





Year released: Japan: October 1980 (69,800 Yen), US: May 1981 ($299.99), UK: September 1981 (£199.99)

Buy it now for: £10-15

Associated magazines: Vic Computing, Commodore User and C&VG

Specifications: MOS 6502A processor running at approximately 1MHz; 5K RAM as standard (3.5K available for programming) that could be expanded further via memory cartridges; Tape and disk interfaces as standard, one joystick port, one user port; Four sound channels in mono provided by the VIC chip itself: three melodic, one noise





VIC-20

ACCORDING TO NEIL HARRIS, WHO JOINED IN EARLY 1981 AS PART OF THE AMERICAN PRODUCT LAUNCH TEAM, COMMODORE WAS A $50 MILLION PER YEAR COMPANY WITH BARELY ANY PRESENCE IN THE US. THE VIC-20 COMPUTER WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE ALL THAT. MAT ALLEN TAKES A LOOK AT THE MACHINE DESTINED TO LEAVE COMMODORE'S FIRST FOOTPRINT ON VIDEOGAME HISTORY

The VIC-20 was such a success in the West that it led to the creation of the Commodore 64 and then the purchase and production of the Amiga. Of course what happened to the company several years down the line is now a major part of computing history, but we're getting ahead of ourselves here. Let's go back to the start, indeed before there was any thought of the computer itself.

One of Commodore's most stunningly brilliant pieces of acquisition had been to buy MOS Technology, creators of the 6502 CPU used in many electronics for the next ten years, in 1976. Two years later, in 1978, the VIC (Video Interface Chip) was designed by Alan Charpentier for third-party sales to arcade manufacturers. Although it could produce both graphics and sound, no one was interested. Their loss. It was kept in-house, awaiting some project to come up that it could be used in.

Although the VIC-20 had many notable people working on it, the most prominent and the person to whom a lot of credit should go is Mike Tomczyk. Hired in April 1980 as Jack Tramiel's assistant, within a month of joining he had managed to visit both Germany and Japan, fired the entire marketing division and come up with the outline to the machine that would eventually turn into the VIC-20. He would become known as the 'VIC Czar'.

His first day at work would be one that defined the rest of his career, due to his attendance at the now infamous meeting just outside London. Tramiel outlined his vision, possibly inspired by Sinclair, of producing a low-cost colour computer to complement the existing PET series. Most present were in favour of continuing the high-end business line, questioning whether such a move was economically feasible. Only a few supported the idea, including Tomczyk himself, Kit Spencer (head of Commodore UK) and Tony Tokai (head of Commodore Japan).

Tramiel listened to the arguments, pounded the table and announced, "The Japanese are coming, so we will become the Japanese." He had reason to worry, however. While Commodore was number one in Europe, it lagged behind Apple and Radio Shack in the US, and Texas Instruments was gradually nudging out its calculator business. Tramiel was worried that the wave of subsidised mid-priced computers in Japan could arrive in the US and do the same to his computer business. And so, he planned a pre-emptive strike to counter this threat.

As was the case when later designing the Commodore 64, the company was not averse to examining the competition and 'borrowing' good ideas from them. Tomczyk's visit to Japan proved fruitful, the function keys of the NEC line, for example, ending up on the VIC-20 but vertically instead. By the end of the month he had typed a 30 page

INSTANT EXPERT

The working title for the VIC-20 was Vixen.

However both 'VIC' and 'Vixen' sound like swear words in German, so it was called the VC-20 (or Volkscomputer) there. Commodore had considered this title for use worldwide but decided against it.

The VIC-20 was designed and launched to stem off potential Japanese competition to Commodore's computer business, going as far as launching in Japan first (as the VIC-1001).

It was the first home computer to sell one million units worldwide, beating the Apple II by a couple of months.

Jeff Minter's career arguably took off with a little game called *Gridrunner* when published in the US, and Satoru Iwata (now head of Nintendo) converted *Galaxian* (aka *Star Battle*) in his formative years with HAL Labs.

William Shatner was hired to promote the computer just before he signed on to play TJ Hooker as his fees were quite low at the time.

During its peak Commodore was manufacturing 9,000 units per day to cope with demand.

Memory expansions were available officially in 3K, 8K and 16K sizes, and although some third-parties produced bigger than this, no game ever needed more.

Commodore released a disk drive for the VIC-20 called the 1540, but it was hardly supported and no games were written (at the time) to take advantage of the format.

Although production of the VIC-20 was halted in late 1984, software companies continued programming and publishing commercial games well into 1985.

» Would you buy a used computer from this man?



VIC-20

OTHER VERSION

VIC-1001

The original hardware is not very different from that released in the West. Aside from the foil and Japanese symbols on the keys, the only other extra is the Japanese ROM inside. In addition to the three standard character sets, by holding Shift and the 'C=' key together on power-up it would instead switch to 'katakana' mode.



Those 'banned' games?

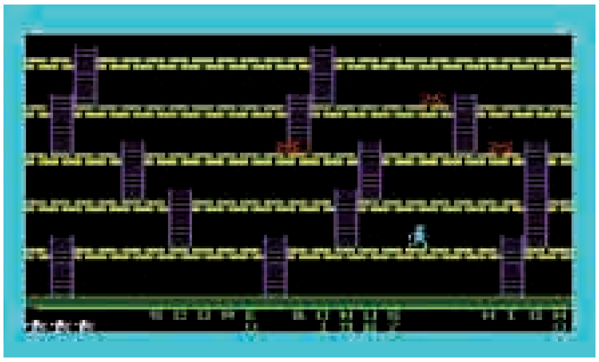
Much has been theorised regarding the fate of two of Commodore's titles, but in light of some recent new information, here's the most likely series of events. Commodore actually had the licence from Namco to convert *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian* and *Rally-X* to the VIC-20, these cartridges do indeed exist. However because Namco had licensed the arcades for distribution in the West to other companies, this deal solely applied to Japan.

Not one to let a minor triviality such as this get in the way of profit, Commodore released *Galaxian* as *Star Battle*, and transformed *Rally-X* into *Radar Rat Race* by way of altering the graphics. While the latter appeared to avoid the gaze of Bally Midway, the former did not and its sale ended up being restricted.

Most likely as a way of placating Bally in this situation, Commodore set up a deal to officially convert some of its other arcades including *Seawolf*, *Gorf* and *Wizard Of Wor*. More was to follow for *Pac-Man*, now called *Jelly Monsters*, as the home licence was owned by Atari and it directly took out an injunction against the game. Curiously enough this was levelled against Commodore UK rather than the parent company; either Atari felt it better to use legal means in this country or the origin of the game was European (there is a rumour it was written by Handic not HAL Labs).

Regardless of all the actions taken out against Commodore neither is that hard to find, certainly a lot less rare than many people make them out to be.





» Most machines got a version of *Space Panic*, and this was no exception (but no apples in sight).

memo to Tramiel outlining everything that needed to be done to turn the idea into an actual computer. Tramiel's sole response was to tell him to "make sure all this gets done", effectively making him head of the project.

In response, two teams at Commodore began work on producing a prototype utilising the VIC produced earlier. Within MOS Technology itself Robert Yannes, who would go on to design the SID chip, cobbled together one prototype from spare PET parts and a desktop-calculator casing. His aim was to promote it as a games machine, a concept that was carried forward to fruition.

The other prototype was constructed by Bill Seiler and John Feagans, literally from hacking bits of other machines together.

on its own; he felt it needed a number afterwards. Tomczyk doesn't know why Tony Tokai chose the '1001' number for the Japanese launch, but he chose '20' because it sounded friendly. This was a theme he was to pioneer.

The VIC-1001 debuted at the Seibu Department store in Japan in September 1980, taking over 100 orders by the end of the month and officially launching in October. While Tomczyk calculated that NEC and other Japanese companies would take a few months to digest this new offering, it would give his team time to prepare for the US launch and hopefully arrive before the competition tried to conquer America. Having worked for two years in Asia he was familiar with their business practices. It was a tactic that worked.

Tomczyk's prime directive to marketers and developers at Commodore was to promote the VIC-20 as a "user-friendly computer", going as far as to trademark the phrase "the friendly computer." Part of this push was to make the VIC-20 available at general retail outlets instead of specialist dealers, putting it on a competitive front with consoles. As it turned out the VIC-20 was advertised positively, comparing its features to consoles as there were no computers available in the same price bracket.

The aim was that if an 'ordinary' person bought the computer, then it should be simple enough for them to understand. Tomczyk himself was responsible for a number of features including the use of symbols and the name of each colour of the front of the keys. The team attempted to make the user manual as friendly and uncomplicated as possible for new computer users, leaving the technical nitty-gritty to the Programmer's Reference Guide.

"FIFTEEN YEARS BEFORE SEGA KILLED OFF ITS OWN HARDWARE (THE SATURN), COMMODORE DID THE SAME BY RELEASING THE COMMODORE 64 IN AUGUST 1982"

The graphics half of the PET motherboard was removed and replaced with the VIC, and then a 9-pin joystick port and cartridge slot (à la Atari 2600) was added. Seiler felt the machine should be a computer, not just a games machine and insisted on having a BASIC language installed for programming. In the end, the finished prototype was a mixture of ideas from both teams.

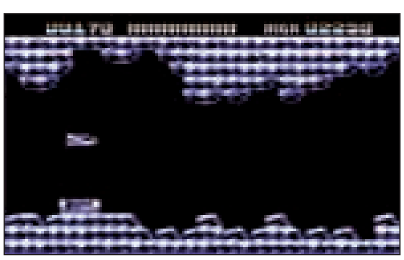
With the machine receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback at the June 1980 CES, the PET engineers were corralled together to complete the final design in under a month. Although the cost of the computer could be kept low due to Commodore's vertical integration, only 5K of RAM could be installed per machine to keep it below Tomczyk's proposed $300 price point (and leave enough margin). While the design was being finished, the team in Japan were busy putting together the first set of software titles for launch. The machine was truly a combined effort and would not have succeeded without either. All that was left was to decide on a name.

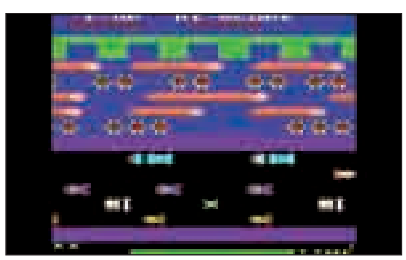
At the beginning it didn't have one except MicroPET, probably because it was created from hacked parts. Many people dubbed it the 'Vixen' as an extension of the VIC name, Tomczyk going as far as doodling little fox logos. In the end though he decided to name it after the primary chip inside. However, 'VIC' sounded incomplete

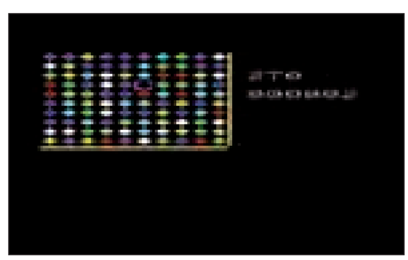
Helping Tomczyk for the American launch were some new recruits including Andy Finkel, Neil Harris (his eventual second-in-command) and Englishman Paul Higginbottom. They were responsible for preparing manuals, fixing the Japanese software for Western launch and getting new games ready. To assist, Tomczyk hired a group of 'hackers' dubbed the 'VIC Commandos' who wrote the initial batch of 12 tape games to complement the higher-priced cartridges. Finkel later wrote a number of games for the VIC and C64, while Higginbottom became one of the main product managers overseeing the computer's success.

Come the launch of the VIC-20 in the US and Europe during 1981, everything seemingly fell into place. The computer was a huge hit with the public and garnered mainly positive reviews from the specialist press. Promotion of the VIC-20 as a 'user-friendly' computer had struck a chord, helped by the use of a familiar face (William Shatner) in prominent TV and magazine adverts. Most major retail chains had their own VIC-20 demonstration display for potential customers to try out. Commodore really was operating at full throttle to promote the computer.

People saw the VIC-20 not only as a games machine, but a device that could help in everyday life by way of the available



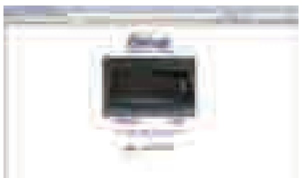




» Many new games are still being developed today as evidenced above by *Dragonwing*, *Frogger '07* and *Jewels Deluxe*.

COMMUNITY – THE BEST VIC-20 WEBSITES

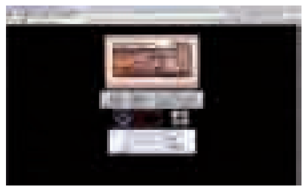
Denial
http://sleepingelephant.com/denial/
Denial may seem a strange name (it's an anagram of the site owner's surname) but it definitely is the focal point of most VIC-20 activity today, especially the forum where details, reports and developments of everything current and past can be found.



Cosine Systems
www.cosine.org.uk
Although it's not Commodore VIC-20 specific, Cosine has been responsible for a number of high-quality demos and games in recent years, all available to download for free from its site. On top of this, the site also features a great links list and C64 downloads.



Digital Archaeology
www.digitpress.com/the_digs/vic20/
A lot of work documenting and archiving everything VIC-20 related was undertaken by Ward Shrake and his team during the Nineties. Now retired from the retro scene, this is a record of everything that is still (mostly) relevant today.



VIC-20 Online
www.eskimo.com/~areed/vic/
VIC-20 Online is a new site, with mostly personal related material featured, but there are a lot of really interesting and detailed scans from magazines and publications from the early Eighties relevant to the VIC-20. There are also reviews of a number of VIC-20 accessories.



software (or by creating their own programs). Programming was no longer confined to the hobbyist or professional as computing was brought into the homes of a wider demographic. As the Spectrum was about to do in the UK, the VIC-20 became a starting point for many people who would later go on to greater things.

Assisting Commodore's profit margins was the assertion by Tomczyk that each unit captured at least another $1,000 worth of accessories and additional hardware. One of these was the VICModem, the first modem to retail at under $100 and responsible for being the first footsteps of many home owners in going online. With the creation of the Commodore Information Network to take some of the strain off telephone customer support, it is no surprise Commodore claimed this board accounted for the largest amount of traffic on CompuServe in 1982.

Indeed, 1982 saw Commodore's fortunes go from good to spectacular, the VIC-20 recording approximately 800,000 units sold and revenue of $300 million on the back of a peak production rate of 9,000 units per day. Tomczyk still expected the Japanese companies to launch their computers in the US and they did, but restricted themselves to the high-end market only. With 1983 in its infancy it became the first home computer to achieve a million sales worldwide. What could possibly halt the success of the VIC-20 now? Well, Commodore itself as it turned out.

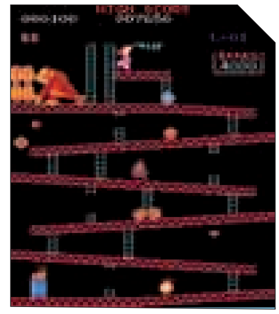
Fifteen years before Sega killed off its own hardware (the Saturn), Commodore did the same by releasing the Commodore 64 in August 1982. It had always been part of the overall scheme of resisting the potential Japanese invasion that another computer would be released, but in such a short time frame it meant the VIC-20 would die before it had been able to live. It can be argued that it was 'sacrificed' for the future of Commodore and just two years after its launch was priced at a mere $200 (in the US) or £100 (in the UK), but still targeted as an entry-level machine.

Curiously enough such a fate was not to befall the C64 once the Amiga arrived a few years after, nor did it apply to the Spectrum. Both carried on into the Nineties with commercial software releases, leaving their predecessors choking on what might have been. By the end of 1984 the last VIC-20 had rolled off the production line and in early 1985 the last computers left the shops, although software was still available. Roughly 2.5 million VIC-20s had been sold; cementing Commodore's standing and defining its future.

And that is really the computer's legacy. Not only did the C64 carry on the look and style, but most of the peripherals and accessories that worked with the VIC-20, such as joystick, datasette, disk drive and printer worked with the new computer. Upgrading was suddenly a lot less painful than it used to be, and it was all part of the design, though it did cause some speed issues.

In its wake it left a host of quality titles that hark back to the simpler arcade days of the time and evoke bygone memories when they are fired up to play. It is a pity many of them are very hard to find, so in these cases emulation is something to be grateful for. It proves that the situation then is the same as now, in that sometimes excellent games don't sell. Today there is a small but dedicated group of programmers writing new games and demos; there may not be much quantity but there is always quality about each production. They are the ones keeping the spirit alive in the same way Tom Griner and Jeff Minter did more than 25 years ago.

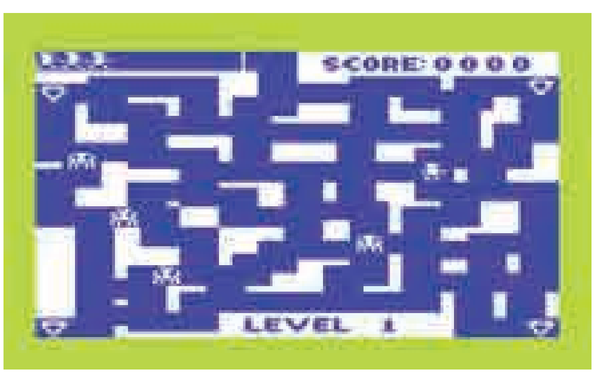
The VIC-20 may have been eclipsed by its big brother C64 in the end, but it deserves to emerge from the shadow and stand on its own as a machine to be reckoned with.



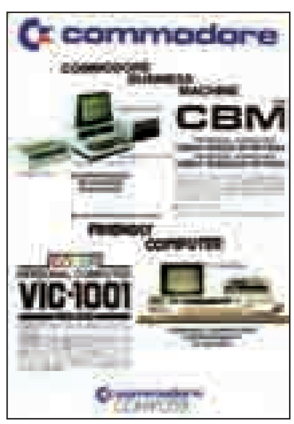
Turning down Nintendo
In today's climate that would be a rather foolish move to make. Back then though it was an entirely different world, one in which American companies mainly ruled the waves. According to Tomczyk, shortly after the release of the VIC-20 in the West, he was able to begin negotiations with Nintendo regarding converting some of its arcade titles, including *Donkey Kong*, to home formats. Such a deal would have been a coup but as Tomczyk was about to sign, Tramiel told him to cancel the agreement.
Tomczyk believes that because of his enthusiasm in general for home formats, Nintendo decided to have a go itself. The timing would seem logical, as development on the Famicom began in August 1981 and the first wave of arcade conversions of Bally Midway titles (see 'Those 'banned' games' boxout) appeared on the VIC-20 in early 1982.
Tomczyk believes Tramiel snubbed Nintendo due to the agreement now in place with Bally.
Atari ended up with the licence to convert Nintendo's arcades to home format, although it wasn't immune to later following suit and screwing up royally on a potential deal…



» Some examples of Tom Griner's ability: *Black Hole* (top) and *Astroblitz*.



» The closest that the VIC-20 ever got to *Wizard Of Wor*. Explore the caves, shoot the monsters and collect all of the treasure.



» Japanese launch advertising for the VIC-1001.



» A range of accessories for the VIC-20.



» The six-port cartridge expander module.

VIC-20

PERFECT TEN GAMES

It may have only survived for five short years (four in the West) but Commodore's VIC-20 still had a healthy range of games available on it. So join us as we look back at ten of the machine's best games. If you're planning on entering the world of the VIC, then these are the games that you can't possibly do without



01

JELLY MONSTERS

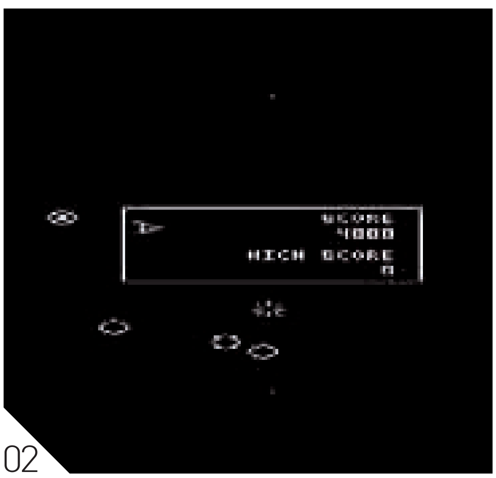
- » **RELEASED:** 1981
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** COMMODORE
- » **CREATED BY:** HAL LABS
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER SMASH BROS

01 **With hindsight it may have been more than just a breach of licence that caused Atarisoft to be so keen to have this game removed from the shelves.** The other reason strikes you soon after you start playing. This is actually an incredibly playable and fun version of *Pac-Man*, far more so than the effort Atarisoft itself later released on the VIC-20. Part of the attraction is the amazingly large software sprites representing the yellow marvel and his foes, as they waltz around the maze after one another. It may not be totally accurate, but then again it was a lot closer than a certain Atari release for the 2600.

OMEGA RACE

- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** COMMODORE
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DRAGON'S DEN

02 **Including another arcade conversion in the list may seem strange, for VIC-20 usually only went so far to reproduce the machines.** There are always exceptions. The expertly programmed *Omega Race* by Andy Finkel is one such exception. *Omega Race* was Midway's only vector arcade game, and he managed to retain the complete look, feel, control and playability of the original. Even under the joystick the ship never feels out of control, and the fast-paced nature of the action makes it a greater draw than *Asteroids*. We'd go as far to say this edition was better than the later C64 conversion.



02

PIRATE COVE ADVENTURE

- » **RELEASED:** 1981
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** COMMODORE
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** VOODOO CASTLE

03 **While the adventures themselves were Scott (or Alexis) Adams' creations, the five licensed to Commodore were programmed by Andy Finkel, who squeezed the originals into 16K each without any loss of substance.** Compression aside *Pirate Cove Adventure* is accepted as one of the best text adventures available, a two-word command assault upon the high seas to solve problems, acquire treasure and return it to the safety of your living room. Most of the puzzles are fairly logical and this will certainly present a challenge to all who attempt it.

MATRIX

- » **RELEASED:** 1983
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** LLAMASOFT
- » **CREATED BY:** JEFF MINTER
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SPACE GIRAFFE

04 **Although Gridrunner started Jeff Minter along the path to worldwide notability, its sequel Matrix (aka Attack Of The Mutant Camels in the US) is the better game overall.** It's harder, more varied, can often throw up a few surprises, and fixes some issues from the original (most notably the ability to 'camp' in the left-hand column to avoid the vertical zapper). The Score Panic mode of the camel waves raises the tempo, and the snitch character at the top keeps you from staying still too long. And we haven't mentioned the shot deflectors yet… one of the VIC's greatest blasters.

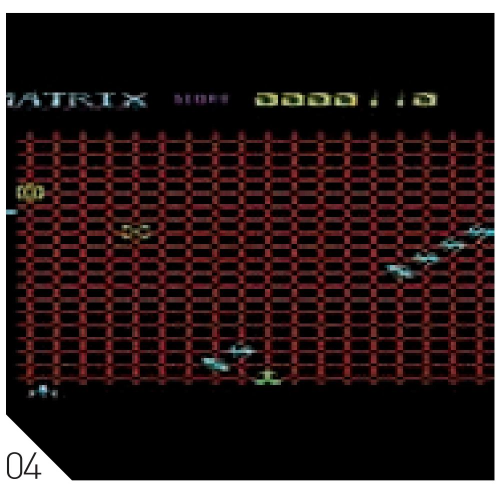
SWORD OF FARGOAL

- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** EPYX
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TEMPLE OF APSHAI

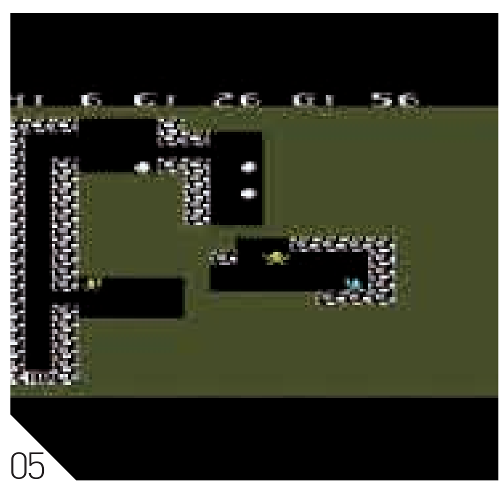
05 **Epyx had already begun the Temple Of Apshai trilogy when Sword Of Fargoal was released.** This was an arcade-like, pared-down version of the dungeon crawler. Your task was to descend through many randomly generated levels in search of the legendary sword, returning to the surface intact. With the ability only to see where you've already explored, it made the game a tense, calculating affair as you decide when to fight, when to run and when to grab all that treasure lying about. Each level was confined to the visible screen, making it feel more claustrophobic in nature. More playable than its C64 cousin.



03



04

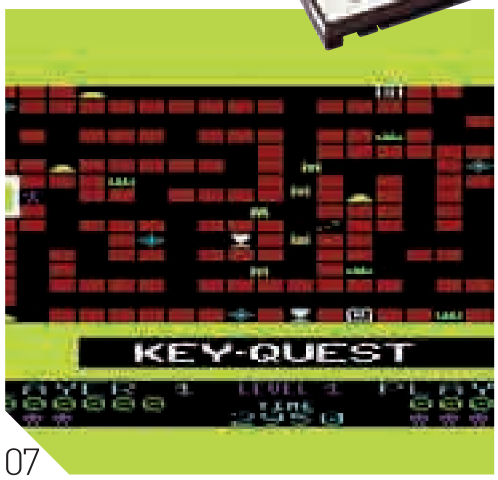


05





06



07



08

DEMON ATTACK

» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** IMAGIC
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ATLANTIS

06 "You not good enough for Demon Attack!" screamed the alien in the commercial. As it transpires, however, the VIC-20 versions of Imagic's Atari 2600 games were good enough, especially this *Phoenix* clone (allegedly). Take control of the lone fighter battling through 84 waves of demon birds that have various different behaviour patterns and quite often split in half when shot. Given the liberal fire that is raining down upon you, this is no easy task after a few waves have been cleared. *Demon Attack* maintains the look and feel of the original game, and, needless to say, it retains the difficulty level as well.

KEY QUEST

» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** TYMAC
» **CREATED BY:** COMPUTER APPLICATIONS INC
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** N/A

07 There's only one real downside to this game: there's only one known copy. Thankfully it's been archived and made available for those who wish to try it out in emulation. It's just a pity it wasn't more widely available at the time as it's a very good game. Much in the style of *Tutankham* you control an intrepid explorer through lots of different mazes collecting treasure, and despatching the continually multiplying enemies though you can only shoot left or right. Gaining 12 treasures in each maze opens the door to the next. Fast paced, challenging and addictive, *Key Quest* well worth checking out.

LASER ZONE

» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** LLAMASOFT
» **CREATED BY:** JEFF MINTER
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TEMPEST 2000

08 Rest assured that Llamasoft barely ever released a dud for the VIC-20, which is why another of Jeff's games features in the list. Controlling two guns at once, you must defend the outpost against the invading Zzyax aliens. While the C64 version allowed for simultaneous two-player action, the VIC-20 original is again arguably the better and more playable title. It is certainly harder by way of the smaller graphics, requiring more precise aiming especially if one of the nasties manages to land on a gun axis. At higher levels it needs total concentration, almost putting yourself "in the zone", a state quite often achieved with Llamasoft titles.



09

ASTRO NELL

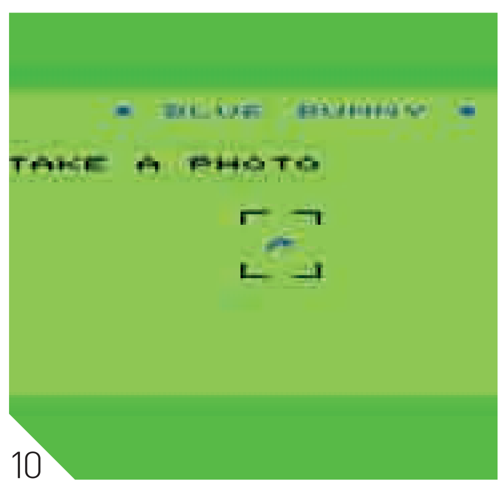
» **RELEASED:** 2004
» **PUBLISHED BY:** COSINE
» **CREATED BY:** MATT SIMMONDS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** VICOLUMN

09 Software Project's Perils Of Willy somehow managed to squeeze in 33 screens of action using the 16K memory expansion. *Astro Nell*, on the other hand, provides the VIC-20 with a *Jet Set Willy* multi-screen experience stuffed into… well, no expanded memory whatsoever. If you can see beyond the astonishment and wonderment of how this is all possible, you also discover that it is just as tricky, nasty and polished as the game it imitates. This is old-school gaming requiring accurate jumps, paper on which to map out the rooms, and a plan to collect all of the items. So much for concessions based on age.

GAME THEORY

» **RELEASED:** 2007
» **PUBLISHED BY:** DENIAL
» **CREATED BY:** JEFF DANIELS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ZOMBIE YARD

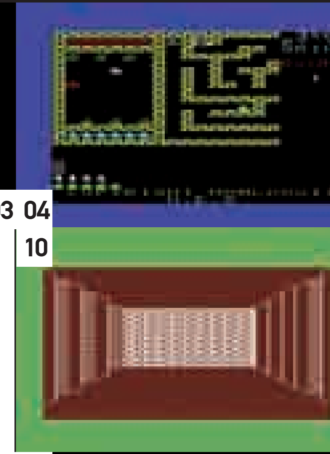
10 WarioWare is a fairly new concept but it has already spawned a few imitators. But would you ever believe that one would appear on the VIC-20? While made simpler to control by requiring only the press (or presses) of the button as opposed to also moving the joystick, it doesn't mean that there is a loss of difficulty. Far from it, many of them are no pushover. Jeff Daniels has also managed to cram a surprising number of different mini-games into just 3.5K, making it a varied and non-repetitive experience. If he carries through his plan for a sequel using the 8K expansion, it should be something worth looking forward to.



10



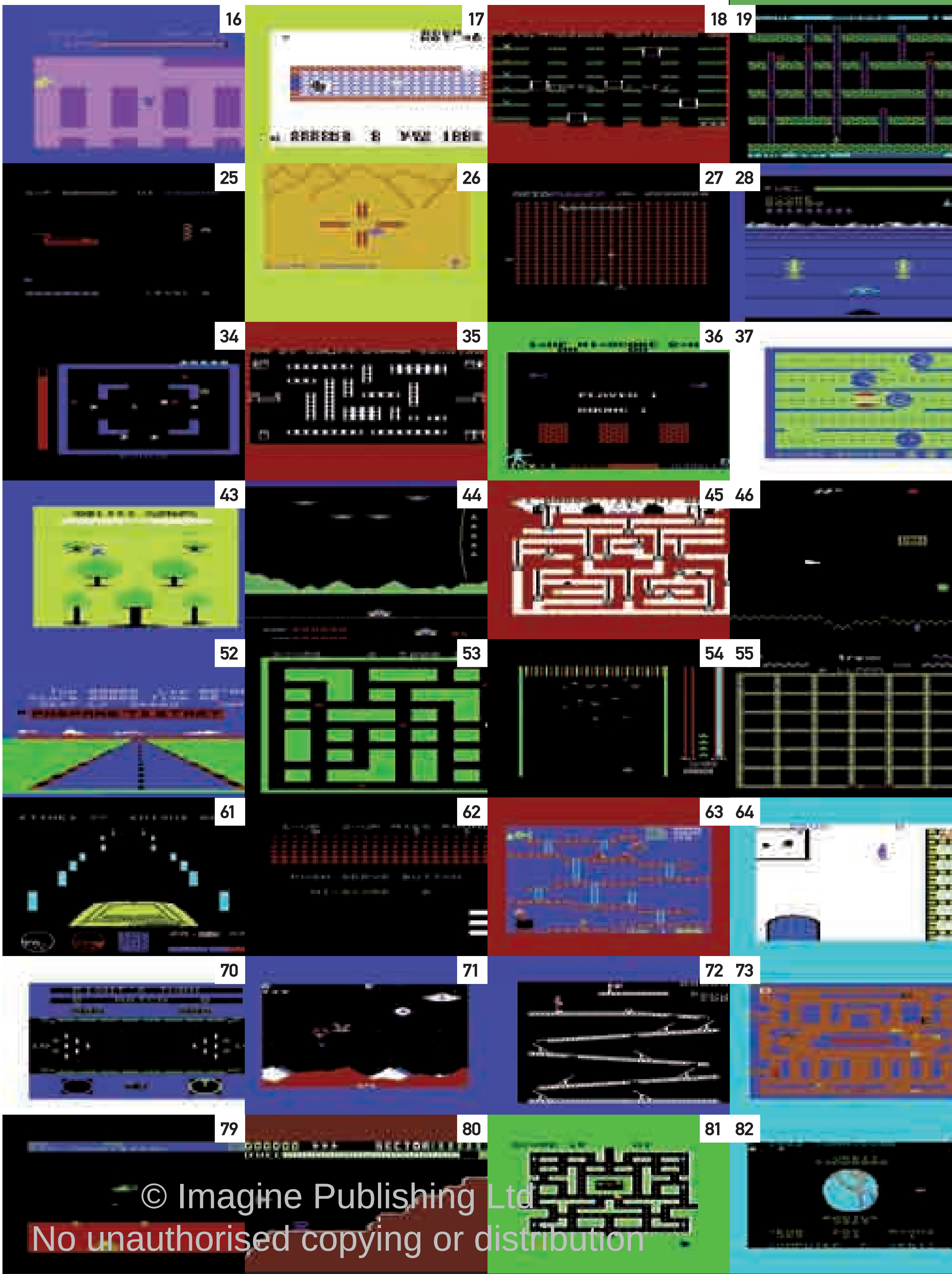


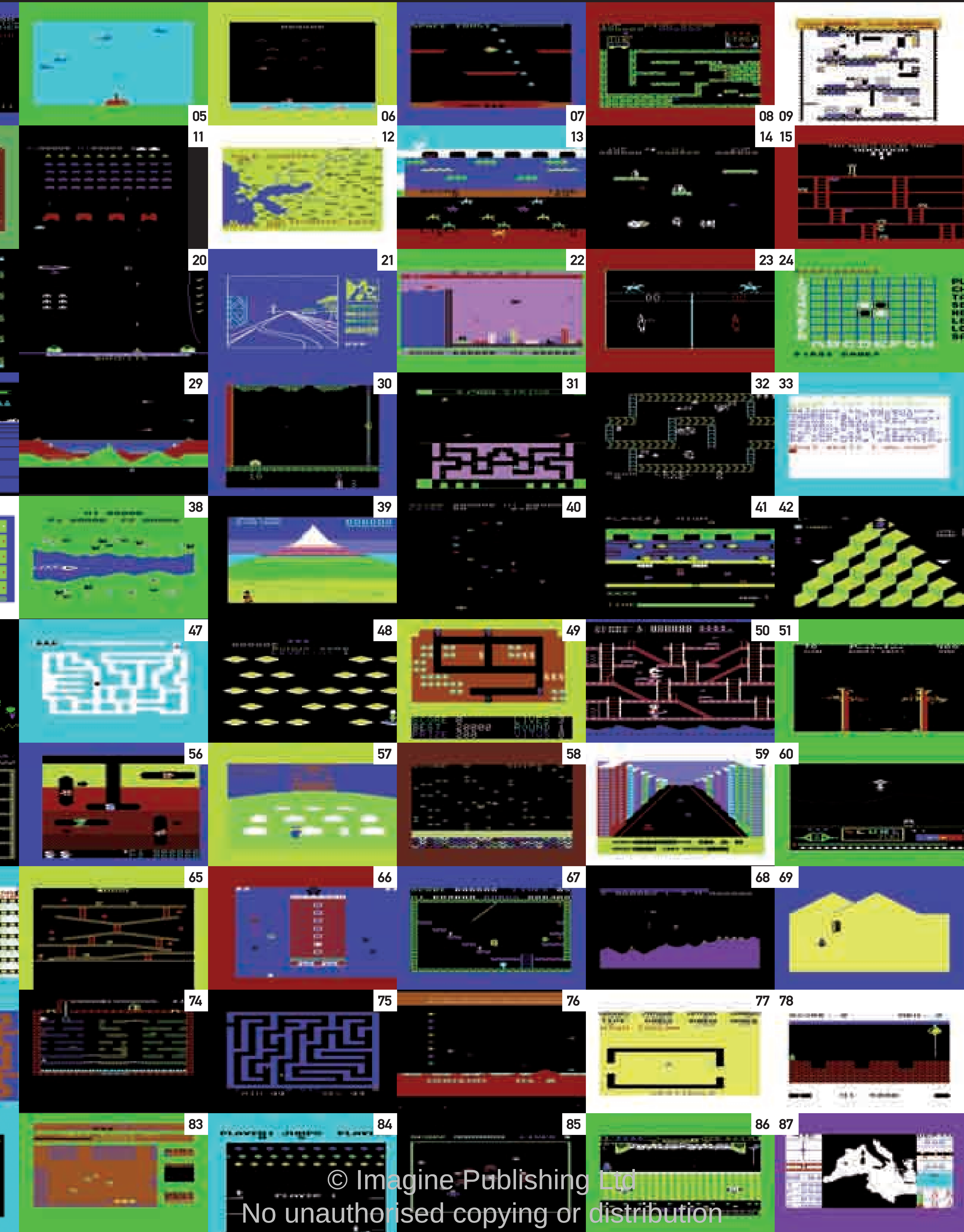


VIC-20
and the rest...

The VIC-20 certainly had its fair share of classic titles, as well as a fair few stinkers as well. Take a gander over the following two pages and see how many classics you can remember playing

01 CENTIPEDE
02 SEAWOLF
03 THE DUNGEONS
04 MAZE
05 PARATROOPER
06 DEADLY DUCK
07 SPACE JOUST
08 TUTANKHAM
09 RAT HOTEL
10 3D LABYRINTH
11 AVENGER
12 GOLD RUSH AND FROG
14 JETPAC
15 FAST EDDIE
16 RADAR RAT RACE
17 TEMPLE OF APSHAI
18 WACKY WAITERS
19 HEKTIK
20 BANDITS
21 AE
22 ENVAHI
23 MEDIEVAL JOUST
24 RENAISSANCE
25 SPACE ESCORT
26 TANK ATAK
27 GRIDRUNNER
28 BUCK ROGERS
29 ATLANTIS
30 OUTBACK
31 SPIDER CITY
32 SHAMUS
33 MISSION IMPOSSIBLE
34 GHOST
35 CATCHA SNATCHA
36 MONEY WARS
37 JAWBREAKER
38 RIVER RESCUE
39 SPIKE'S PEAK
40 COSMIC FIREBIRDS
41 FROGGER
42 Q*BERT
43 ROBIN HOOD
44 GALACTIC ABDUCTORS
45 MINE MADNESS
46 STAR DEFENCE
47 RAID ON FORT KNOX
48 TOPPER
49 DIGGER
50 BONGO
51 PREDATOR
52 POLE POSITION
53 SUPER ALIEN
54 THRESHOLD
55 TRAXX
56 DIG DUG
57 GHOST MANOR
58 BEEKEEPER
59 DEATH RACE
60 LUNAR LEEPER
61 ROAD RACE
62 THE SKY IS FALLING
63 WITCH WAY
64 PIPES
65 MINER 2049ER
66 APE ESCAPE
67 FORBIDDEN TOWER
68 MARTIAN RAIDER
69 PHARAOH'S TOMB
70 RICHOCHET
71 TERRAGUARD
72 CANNONBALL BLITZ
73 GARDEN WARS
74 JOHNNY JUMPET
75 AMAZING MAZE
76 K-STAR PATROL
77 RESCUE AT RIGEL
78 QUASIMODO
79 CHOPLIFTER!
80 SKRAMBLE
81 TRASHMAN
82 VISIBLE SOLAR SYSTEM
83 SCORPION
84 CLOWNS
85 MINITRON
86 PUNCHY
87 SUBMARINE COMMANDER




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SUPERMAN

SPANDEX NEVER LOOKED SO GOOD





- **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £40+ PCB BOARD



HISTORY

Even the next-gen muscles of 360 and PS3 were not potent enough to top Taito's early take on DC's pant-wearer. Super-powered breath, the chance to soar high up into the stratosphere and interact with a fully 3D Metropolis is still no match for this humble Eighties arcade classic.

It was a prolific coin guzzler for its day which, thanks to its striking comic book look, finally allowed players to do what Lex Luthor couldn't: boss around a man in his underpants.

The game captured perfectly the iconic look of Superman, the curly quiff creeping out of his blue oily hair, his subtle non-steroid crammed physique encased in a bright colourful suit. Every level felt expansive – a feeling bolstered by having them split into multi-scrolling sections. One minute Superman would be levelling a brick wall or tossing a Ferrari into his foes and the next he'd be burning to cinder iron girders and Apache helicopters with his laser sight.

Each level finished with a climactic boss battle which, because of Superman's chunky build, would generally prove harder to stomach than a kryptonite sandwich.

Strangely, despite the fact that there has only ever existed one Superman, the game could be played co-operatively with the second player seeing their ten pence foster a red-and-silver iteration of the hero. Although clearly displaying the Superman insignia on his chest, many comic aficionados claim the second player was planned to be none other than DC's Captain Marvel, but the idea was ditched at the last minute. This theory is backed up by the game's peculiar end message, which refers to Superman as two people.

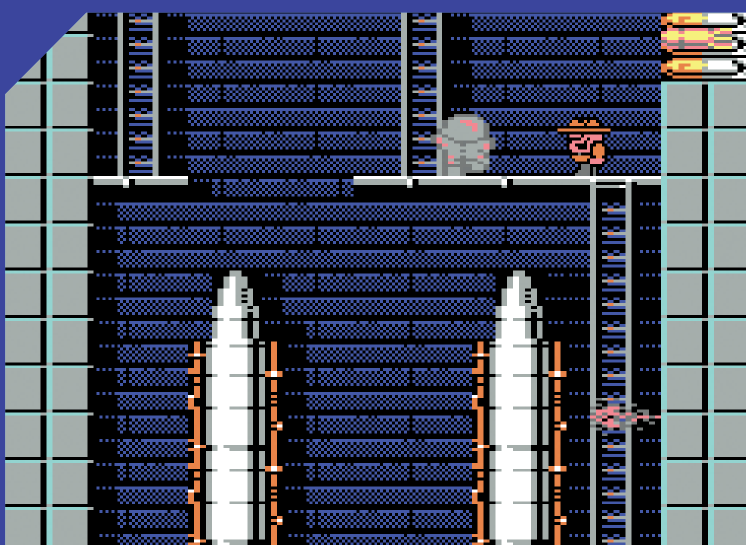
The game featured the iconic *Superman* score, and a fantastic lead into the action that showed Clark changing from a mild mannered, blue-collar reporter into his square-chinned spandex-loving alter ego. Right, must dash, I sense a pretty girl picnicking dangerously close to a combine harvester.

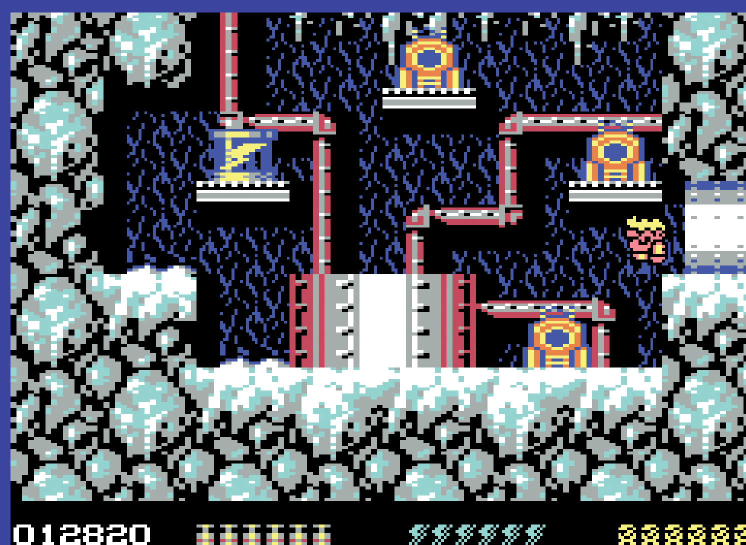

I AM THE BEST ARTIST
CREDIT
PUSH 2P BUTTON
CASINO
COLD
Paradise
GAME OVER

THE MAKING OF…

RICK DANGEROUS I & II

Before Lara Croft, Core Design was responsible for another globetrotting, tomb-raiding, world-saving hero. This hero wore a hat, carried a big stick and answered to the name of Rick Dangerous. Andrew Fisher explores the past, with Terry Lloyd and other members of the Core Design team as his guide







Gremlin Graphics' Derby office became Core Design in 1988 when Jeremy Heath-Smith and Kevin Norburn turned it into a separate company. Simon Phipps and Terry Lloyd decided to start work on designing a brand-new videogame that would be influenced by *Indiana Jones*.

"We sat down, writing a list of game genres and themes, discounting those that had been done recently," begins Simon. "After about an hour we saw that the only thing that remained on our list was the one that read '*Indiana Jones*/adventurer' and we realised how few games had explored the theme let alone done it well.

The arcade conversions based on the films had come and gone, but nothing for us had ever captured the feeling of those first five minutes of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* with the hero leaping pits, dodging poison darts and being pursued by giant balls of rock."

As Terry recalls, "I watched videos of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* over and over again. Obviously the opening scenes in *Raiders*, complete with rolling ball, inspired the first level. But the graphics in the Egyptian level were put together mostly out of my own head, exploring ancient pyramids riddled with traps is exciting. Schwarzendumpf Castle and the Missile Base were from *Raiders* as well, when Indy sneaks on to the submarine and steals the Nazi's uniform and hat." A versatile hero, Rick shot enemies, dropped dynamite and poked things with his stick.

"Rick was originally intended to have a lot more abilities," remembers Terry, "but we made the decision to ensure all Rick's actions could be performed on the joystick. I disliked action/platform games in which you had to reach over and press 'Space' to perform extra actions. We kept the most crucial abilities performed with a press of the 'Fire' button and a direction. I think it worked well at the time and it still does. It's quite logical and intuitive.

Rick's jump parabola was inspired by *Super Mario Bros*," he continues. "He had the ability to change direction while in mid-air, since up until that point most platform games had fixed heights and distances. With Rick you could dodge and weave mid-jump and drift while falling, which allowed players maximum



» Is this legal under the Geneva Convention? (C64, Level 3).

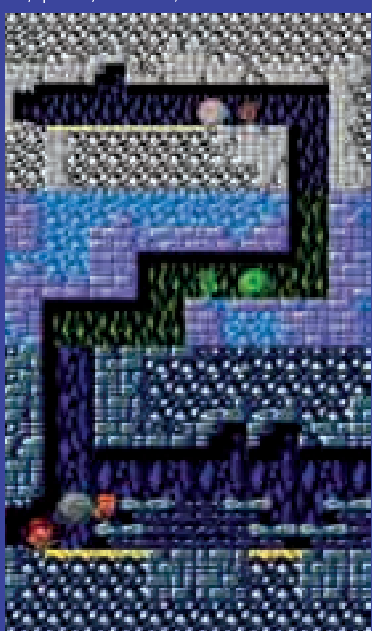


» A tricky puzzle involving spikes and a moving block (Amiga).

control to react to anything unknown such as poisoned arrows and spiked pits," explains Simon. "We doodled loads of ideas for traps and puzzles and other scenarios, and I figured out how we could code a simple trap system that would allow us to easily create everything from bats to bulldogs to pit traps and rolling boulders."

Given the chance, would Simon have changed anything in the final game? "I really, really should have stuck to my guns and insisted that the triple-jump on the second part of the Egyptian level was made easier. It kills me every time," he admits. "It was the first time in my career in the videogame industry that I'd ever had an argument about difficulty. It's so easy to forget when you've been working on a game for months that what you consider 'easy' is usually frightfully difficult for most other players – because they don't have the hidden insight into

» The 8-bit rolling boulder sequence (from top to bottom: C64, Spectrum, and Amstrad).



how the game's data and triggers are arranged, or how the creatures' logic really works. Playing it now, the game remains damned hard. But then again, I've always been rubbish at Mario too…"

The tricky level design was the work of several individuals. "Working on *Rick Dangerous* was my first job in the videogame industry," begins Bob Churchill. "I'd been a gofer at Gremlin Graphics for about six months, answering the phone, replying to letters and running errands. One day Jeremy asked me if I would like to be a game designer for them. I designed and built the extra levels for the Atari ST and Amiga versions.

To create the levels, we used an in-house level editor that was so simple to use it was a joy. There was a catalogue of blocks to choose from and then you simply had to move them around and drop them into position, allowing us to build levels quickly. Parts of the extra levels that I designed for the first *Rick Dangerous* were way too hard. We didn't have much in the way of focus testing or QA back then. I could play through to the end of the game and that was that."

Stu Gregg joined Core Design around the same time. "I was working at Gremlin Birmingham and was sick of all the travelling," he recalls. "I had known Simon since school and the other guys for a few years. They needed an extra programmer and the rest is history. I was only involved in the first game, programming the C64 version and half of the PC version. I think everybody did a bit of playtesting and design though."

Chris Long, who worked on the sequel, remembers another difficult section. "There was the 'pixel-perfect jump'. I remember this was late in a *Rick I* level, and you had to do something along the lines of getting Rick on the correct animation frame before you jumped, or you wouldn't make it. That was pretty harsh: near the end of a level, in a game with no save option. You would never get away with that today. Back then, gamers needed the dexterity and reflexes of a cat, and they must graduate from ninja school. With honours."

Short animated cut-scenes advanced the plot between levels, except on the Spectrum and Amstrad versions that had to make do with text. A specially commissioned comic book was included in the original box. Simon comments that, "The cartoon strip was drawn by Ian Gibson of *2000AD*'s *Robo Hunter* fame. We knew nothing about this until we received boxed copies of the game, and it was a great surprise to think that one of my comic artist heroes had illustrated a game that I'd worked on. The 'Fat Guy' was entirely the creation of Mr Gibson, and was such a hit with us that we simply had to bring him in as Rick's nemesis when it came around to doing the sequel."

"Initial ideas for *Rick* had a more varied set of traps and pitfalls," continues Terry. "Massive spiked walls were going to move in and out, floors were going to collapse and the game was going to

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** FIREBIRD/MICROPLAY (RICK DANGEROUS), MICROSTYLE/MICROPLAY (RICK DANGEROUS II)

» **DEVELOPER:** CORE DESIGN

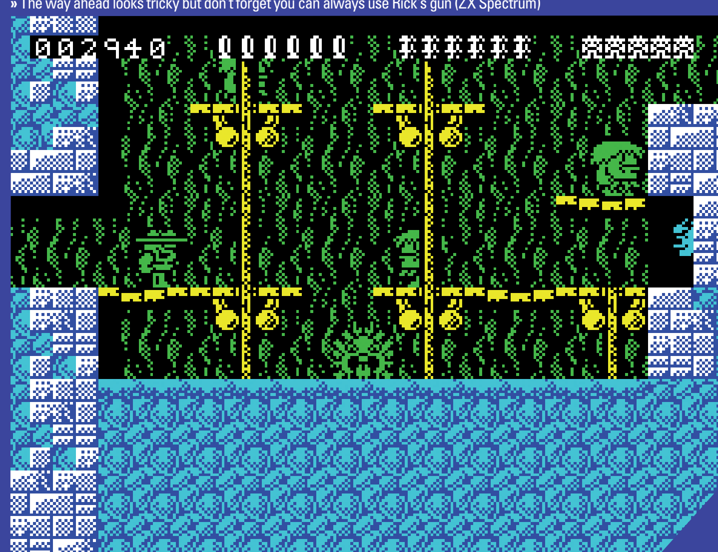
» **RELEASED:** 1989 (RICK DANGEROUS), 1990 (RICK DANGEROUS II)

» **GENRE:** PLATFORM

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3-£10



» The way ahead looks tricky but don't forget you can always use Rick's gun (ZX Spectrum)



THE MAKING OF… RICK DANGEROUS I & II

STYLISH MICROS

Microprose set up two new labels in the early-Nineties to handle games that were different from their famous simulations. MicroStatus was aimed at the 16-bit machines, publishing conversions of Freescape games including *Total Eclipse* (before Incentive signed with Domark to publish *Castle Master*). MicroStyle's aim was to publish games for a more mature audience. One of its first releases was *Stunt Car Racer* by Geoff Crammond, and several other titles moved across from Firebird/Telecomsoft when Microprose purchased that label. *Rainbow Warrior*, an environmental-themed game in association with Greenpeace, also appeared on MicroStyle. To add to the confusion, the American arm of the label became known as MicroPlay. *Rick Dangerous* was released on MicroPlay in the US, but still came with the Firebird logo in Europe. The sequel made its debut on MicroStyle, before both games were re-released on the Kixx budget label.



» Compare the Firebird and MicroPlay covers.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SWITCHBLADE
SYSTEM: C64, SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1989 (16-BIT), 1990 (AMSTRAD CPC), 1991 (C64, SPECTRUM)

IMPOSSAMOLE
SYSTEMS: C64, SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD, AMIGA, ATARI ST, TURBOGRAFX-16
YEAR: 1990

TOMB RAIDER
SYSTEMS: SATURN, PSONE, PC
YEAR: 1996



have a full eight-way scroll (as we had done for the Commodore 64 version of *Jack The Nipper II*). But designing a game that could share map data and gameplay across multiple hardware meant we had to cater for the least able machines. In fact, even the Atari ST had problems doing a smooth horizontal scroll without reducing colours by having fewer bit-planes, so Simon made the decision to design maps that were a series of connected scrolling towers. Basically, the game had a smooth scroll vertically, but page-flipped to horizontally connected rooms."

As Simon explains, "The game ran to 85 screens in size on the 8-bit formats, with 50 additional screens on the 16-bit formats, split across the four levels. There were 74 different enemy and trap types in the game, all handled by the same very simple and very small control routine. Rick's characteristic 'Waaaah!' sound effect was actually me – recorded on an old tape cassette machine – the result of myself and Terry spending half an hour making ridiculous noises for the game and picking the funniest."



» An early shot from the CPC version of the game.

The background graphics for each of the four levels were made up of just 128 characters each. The screen was limited to 256 pixels wide (the width of the Spectrum screen), and the sprites were designed around the size of a standard C64 sprite – 24 pixels wide by 21 pixels high. Sprite overlays gave the C64 Rick extra detail. As Simon says: "The squashed look of the characters was inspired by the Spectrum game *Joe Blade*, and the wondrous art of Argentinian cartoonist Guillermo Mordillo whose posters and postcards fascinated me as a kid in the Seventies. The saviour of the project was OCP Art Studio, it allowed us to convert the art to double-width pixels (for Commodore 64 and Amstrad), and lots of cool colour-replacement tools that meant converting down to fewer colours was a breeze. Rob Toone wrote the custom map editor on C64 that allowed us to build the maps. Everything else was a case of typing in co-ordinates to text files."

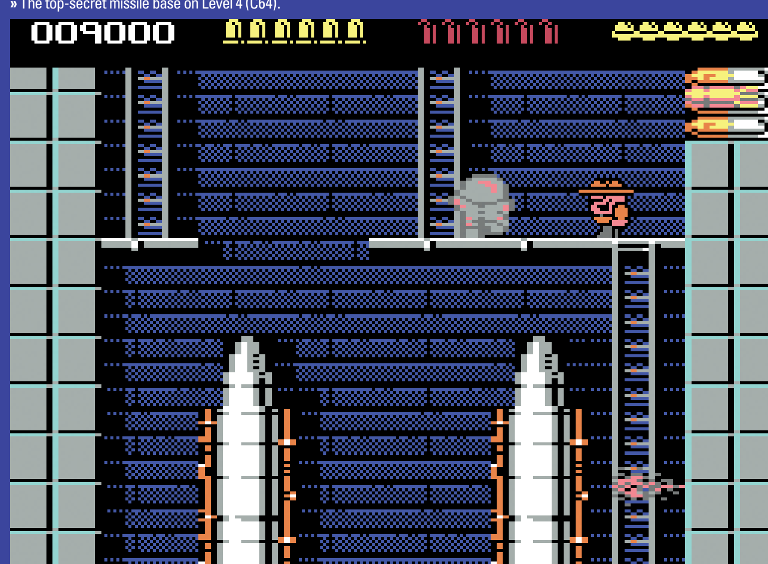
> "PLAYING IT NOW, THE GAME'S STILL DAMNED HARD. BUT THEN AGAIN, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN RUBBISH AT MARIO TOO." SIMON PHIPPS

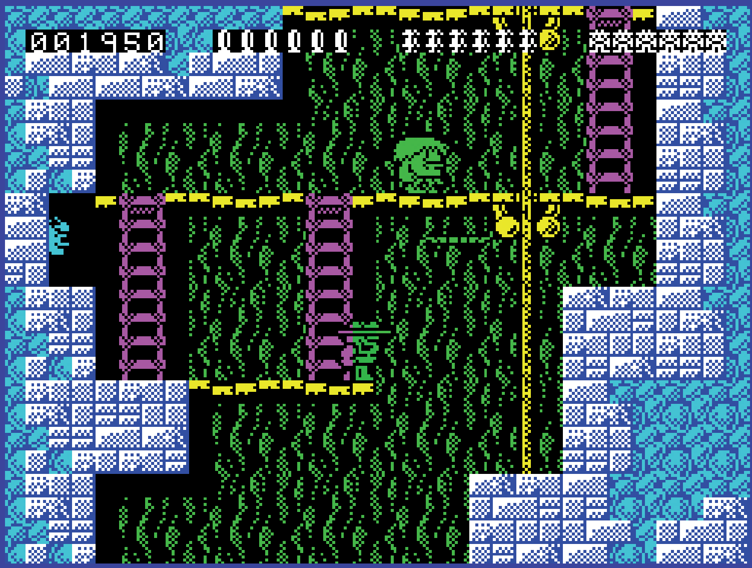
Key players in the 8-bit conversions were Dave Pridmore (Z80 code for Spectrum and Amstrad) and Stu Gregg (Commodore 64), with Dave and Stu also handling the PC version. PC users had the four-colour CGA mode, or the EGA mode that had 16 colours but didn't quite match the original 16-bit palette. Stu says: "I remember fooling around with the first samplers and scanners, scanning various body parts and adding them to the boot sequence of the PC we used. Oh, and Greg Holmes would always call Dave Pridmore – the Z80 programmer – Ken, so we all started calling him that."

The design of the game commenced in July 1988, and took just four months to complete. The actual release was delayed until the following year, partly due to Microprose's acquisition of Telecomsoft and its software labels. Richard Hewison was working for Telecomsoft at the time. "Within the company, we all knew that *Rick Dangerous* was a good fun game. It wasn't doing anything new but it was tongue-in-cheek. There's no way you could keep a straight face when you heard the 'Waaaah!' whenever a foe was defeated. The marketing department decided to keep *Rick Dangerous* under their hat. It was considered to be a secret weapon in their software armoury. However, Microprose's marketing department was more used to promoting military flight simulators than fun arcade platform games. It didn't affect sales of the game, which went to number one across Europe, but I'm sure that the Telecomsoft approach for the box artwork would have been much more light-hearted."

The ending of the first game saw Rick return to London as alien ships landed in Hyde Park. A blast of laser fire knocked Rick's hat off, revealing blond hair and a new costume. "Rick

» The top-secret missile base on Level 4 (C64).





» Rick suffers from a little bit of colour clash while he contemplates what to do next (ZX Spectrum).



» Rick realises that the bullets are just out of his reach (ST).



» The opening page of the *Indy*-inspired comic book from *Rick Dangerous*.

was off in a flash." The Amiga and ST versions came with a 'sepia tone' mode to remind players of the Thirties *Flash Gordon*. Simon recalls: "We were asked if we could do a sequel by Microprose. We said yes and decided to take Rick into space, *Flash Gordon* style. We had done all we could with the thing and we wanted to see what was under that hat. The biggest thing for us was building a more sophisticated trap and trigger system, a task that was handed over to Dave 'Ken' Pridmore. He created a system that allowed us to do more things: multiple state traps, allowing anything to collide with anything. The code driving it was so sophisticated that we all converted the logic line-by-line from the Z80 code, with Dave talking us through it – he was the only one who understood most of what it could do."

With the 8-bit versions using a multiloader and featuring bigger cut-scenes, each of the five levels had its own 256-character set for the background that allowed a lot more detail. Players could choose to tackle the first four levels – the alien spaceship in Hyde Park, the Ice Caverns of Freezia, the Forests of Vegetabalia, and the Atomic Mud Mines – in any order before infiltrating the Fat Guy's headquarters on Level 5. Replacing the dynamite was the time bomb. Rick could either drop it next to an obstacle to blow it up or slide it along platforms to reach a target – allowing new types of puzzle to be created. "The idea of being able to slide explosives came from Tim at Microprose – something we found we could easily implement given Dave's great work on the trap system," says Simon. Rick could also use his fist to hit switches and stop enemies, which required expert timing.

» Rick parachutes into trouble (C64).



"I MUST BE MAD TO STILL BE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY" CHRIS LONG

Chris Long chips in about his own experiences. "I was part of the *Monty Python* game team who moved on to *Rick Dangerous II*, so I got landed with the Commodore 64 version… which was pretty lucky for me. Aside from coding the C64 edition of *Rick II*, I did some work on the enemy patrol movements and animation tables. The Commodore 64 version required the usual sprite multiplexer in order to display more than eight sprites. There was some simple compression and building-block stuff to help fit it in. Terry did a sterling job on the conversion of the art to the 8-bit machines, but he probably won't allow that in this article because he's too modest… right, Tel?"

Bob Churchill was also involved. "For *Rick Dangerous II* I had a little more

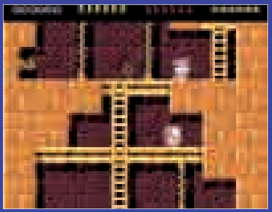
» A thrilling text screen from the Amstrad version of *Rick Dangerous*…



LARA, I AM YOUR FATHER

Simon is not the only one who sees the links between Rick Dangerous and Lara Croft. "Someone else from Core is doing a pretty good job of raiding tombs now…" Richard Hewison agrees. "For what it's worth, my pet theory is that Rick is the real father of tomb raider, Lara Croft."

The official website for *Tomb Raider Anniversary* and the Gametap *Ten Years Of Tomb Raider* documentary cite the similarities between *Rick Dangerous* and Toby Gard's 3D creation. During development for the first *Tomb Raider*, the hero was a man in a hat armed with a whip, very much inspired by Indy (and Rick). This was changed to a Latin American woman known as Laura Cruz, and eventually to the pistol-wielding heroine we are now familiar with. Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky's book *Lara Croft: Cyber Heroine*, on the whole *Tomb Raider* phenomenon, even compares Rick's oversized nose with Lara's ample assets…



» Rick raids a tomb years before Lara turned up (C64).

RICK DANGEROUS I & II



» In glorious four-colour mode, Rick explores Level 1 (PC CGA).



» EGA may have had more colours, but Rick is still suffering from jaundice (PC).

experience so had greater input into the game design as a whole and built all the levels." Chris muses on the difficulty level, which remained very high throughout. "People often say that Rick is a very unforgiving game. I remember a sequence near the start of *Rick II*. A helpful arrow directs the player to a particular button they have to activate in order to progress, press it and off you go. Nice. Soon after, another helpful arrow pops up, directing the player toward a different button 'Hey, this is easy!' This one however, activates the laser pointing directly at you. It's the wrong button. Push it and you're dead… the correct button is two steps away on the opposite wall. It gave us a laugh anyway, even if we killed everyone who played it on their first pass."

"CORE WAS BRAND NEW AT THE TIME AND EVEN THOUGH WE HAD ALL PUBLISHED GAMES BEFORE, EVERYBODY WORKED HARD TO PROVE THEMSELVES AND CORE" STU GREGG

The end of *Rick Dangerous II* shows the Fat Guy escaping in a teleporter with the caption "What will Rick do next?" Simon explains: "Terry and I had Rick jump into a teleporter at the end of the game to leave the series open. I'd always mused about what would happen if Rick went into the black-and-white world of Bogart, Sam Spade and *The Maltese Falcon*. So the teleporter could misfire and send Rick back in time, forward or even sideways. Terry wanted to go in a different direction.

"I wanted to pay homage to the old Monster movies of the past (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Werewolf*, *The Mummy*) with settings in a spooky mansion, castle, dungeons, torture chamber, sewers (*Phantom Of The Opera*), misty forest, and so on," he says. But the third official *Rick Dangerous* game was never to emerge. Simon sighs, "In this time of multi million-dollar projects with years-long development times it would be great to get that small handful of guys back together and knock out a game for six formats in under four months."

Terry moved to California in 1991 with ideas for a brand-new SNES game. "I was designing a game called *Danger Dan*, which contained elements of what I wanted to do in *Rick III*, with a full eight-way scrolling playfield, bigger sprites and expanded range of abilities. The character was going to be able to whack enemies more fluidly with the stick or cane, but was also going to be able to use it to grab onto stuff and swing across gaps or pole-vault over things with it."

Back in England, Jeremy Heath-Smith wanted a new game with a man with a stick in it, so Simon set to work and the result was *Bubba & Styx* for Mega Drive. Terry admits he would like to do another game in the series. "I work now as a freelance game designer/consultant. I have a design

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Chris Long says: "I must be mad to still be in the games industry." He worked on Herdy Gerdy before leaving Core with Jeremy to form Circle Studio. "Core were a great bunch to work with and I learned a lot too. It really was the best job in the world. The old team is scattered around the globe now, but we sometimes pop up in each other's lives. It's hard to convey the family feel of Core, especially the early years. It was a privilege to be there." Dave Pridmore is at Eurocom and worked with Terry Lloyd on the *Harry Potter* and *Spyro: A Hero's Tail* games, while Simon Phipps is currently at Criterion. Bob Churchill worked on *Crash Of The Titans* for Radical in Canada. Meanwhile, Stu Gregg now works for a web design company, in the same office as former C64 programmer Mark Kelly.



» Core at the time of *Rick Dangerous*: Back: Andy Williams, Greg Holmes, Bob Churchill, Rob Toone, and Andy Green. Front: Simon Phipps, John Kirkland.

» Doesn't Rick look dashing with his new blonde tresses (C64).



» Rick's blue cape did not give much protection on the ice planet Freezia (Amstrad).





» Bonus rooms held extra ammo and points, if you could find them (C64).



» Rick's piloting skills had not improved over the years (C64).

"WITH RICK YOU COULD DODGE AND WEAVE MID-JUMP AND DRIFT WHILE FALLING, WHICH ALLOWED PLAYERS MAXIMUM CONTROL TO REACT TO THE UNKNOWN" TERRY LLOYD

for a new *Rick Dangerous* if Eidos is interested in resurrecting the character."

The fans still wanted more adventures for Rick, and the remakes appeared. *Rick Dangerous 2.5* was given away on a coverdisk for *The One* magazine, but was essentially a single new level. The MSX got its own version, thanks to dedicated Dutch fans, and then Rick explored the Acorn Archimedes. More recently, *XRick* allowed console (Xbox, PlayStation 2 and GameCube) and Linux fans to play too. *XRick* has been ported to the GP2X and Nintendo DS, for portable dangerous action. Unfortunately, Rick *Dangerous Advance* was cancelled after Core Design refused to release the licence.

One of the largest resources on the internet is the quite excellent Rick Dangerous Resurrected site at www.rickdangerous.co.uk – fans can check out music, graphics, screenshot maps and links to remakes. Chris says: "I have been to the website and played it again. I cannot get very far on it these days though. I used to be able to whizz through it quite easily – I knew where every single trap was."

Churchill concurs, "I played it a couple of years ago, through emulation, and laughed out loud when the dead guys flew toward the screen. It also gave me a great sense of pride, as it truly was a fun game to play. I think it would be great to see another funny take on the hat-wearing adventurer, but will Rick be revived? I'm not so sure."

Simon admits, "I remember it as a really fun game to work on and it was a real group effort, Core Design was brand new at the time and even though we had all published videogames before, everybody worked hard to prove themselves and Core."

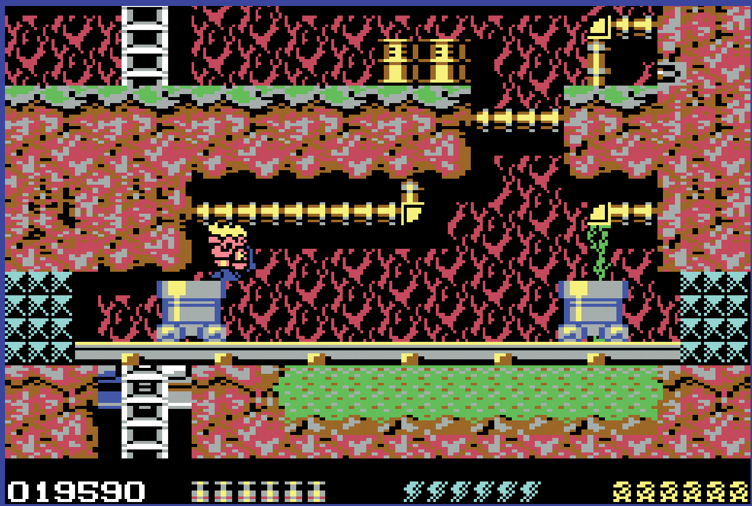
Simon is extremely impressed with the longevity of the *Rick Dangerous* games. "I am constantly surprised by the number of formats that Rick keeps springing up on now some 20 years afterward. I often get emails from fans that have done some wonderful conversion work and are trying to find out who owns the copyright in order to get their version of *Rick* published. The ones that stick out in my mind are *Dangerous Xmas* on the Game Boy Advance – a Christmas remix of *Rick*, and there's an excellent Flash version of Rick that will play in a web browser. How cool is that?"



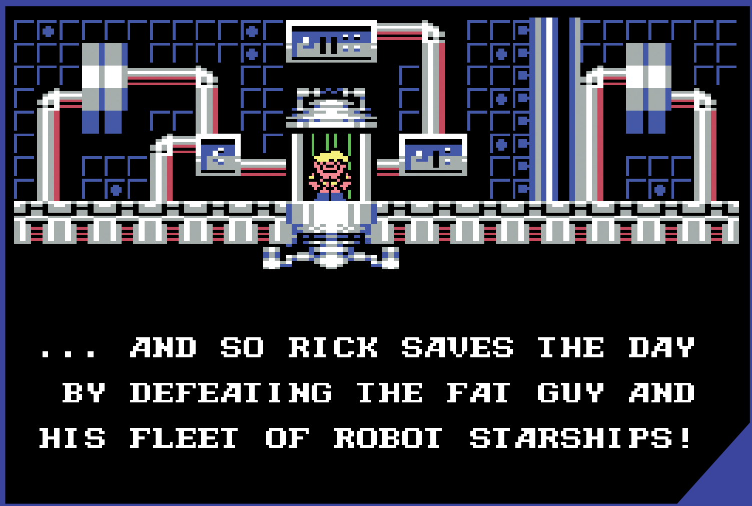
» Rick hopes no one notices he's only got the one male model pose…

Special Thanks to Jim Waterman of the *Rick Dangerous Resurrected* website for PC screenshots, and to Richard Hewison of The Bird Sanctuary (www.birdsanctuary.co.uk)

» Rick knows a thing or two about riding mine carts, too (C64).



» The end of *Rick Dangerous II*, as our hero steps into the teleporter… (C64).



BOX OF DELIGHTS!

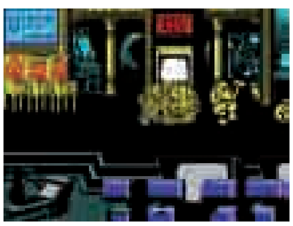
2 - HOT 2 - HANDLE



WITH THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN AND NOW 2 - HOT 2 - HANDLE, OCEAN IS TRULY THE DADDY WHEN IT COMES TO NUMERICALLY PUNNED COMPILATION TITLES THAT EASILY SIGNIFY HOW MANY GAMES ARE INSIDE THEIR BOXES. STUART POPS ON A PAIR OF OVEN GLOVES AND GETS A HANDLE ON OCEAN'S HOTTEST COMPILATION PACK

The number two features a lot in this advert: first, two by two examples of numerical reference, two rather unnecessary Ocean motifs and two visual aids used for each game: one boxart and one screenshot.





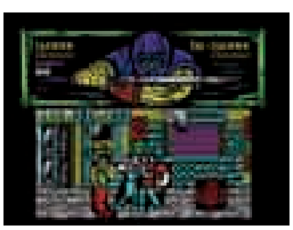


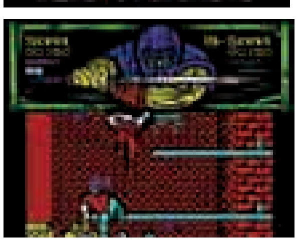
GOLDEN AXE

Ahh, it's Sega's *Golden Axe*, a game that splits opinion with a clunky broadsword. It's a little-known fact that for every person living on this planet that likes *Golden Axe* there's a direct clone that dislikes it in equal amounts. What we effectively have here is a Neolithic *Double Dragon*, but instead of the Lee brothers we get a non-related troupe of Warrior, Dwarf and Amazon, who each have a score to settle with the nasty old Death Adder. The gameplay basically consists of walking right, until you meet a moving graphic that isn't you and then proceeding to hack the jerk out of them. The Spectrum version isn't the prettiest port of the game and its often twitchy combat and greasy pace makes it almost feel like your protagonists are flying around on broomsticks. The Speccy port does do a pretty good job of retaining the original's ending though; the one where the villains smash out of the arcade cab and our heroes chase them down Benny Hill-style. It's unfortunate then that we're paid to review games based on how they play and not their faithfulness to arcade endings.

TRIVIA The death screams of the bad guys are digitised from screams used in the films *First Blood* and *Conan The Barbarian*.

MAG RATING *Golden Axe* was awarded 30% in *Your Sinclair*.



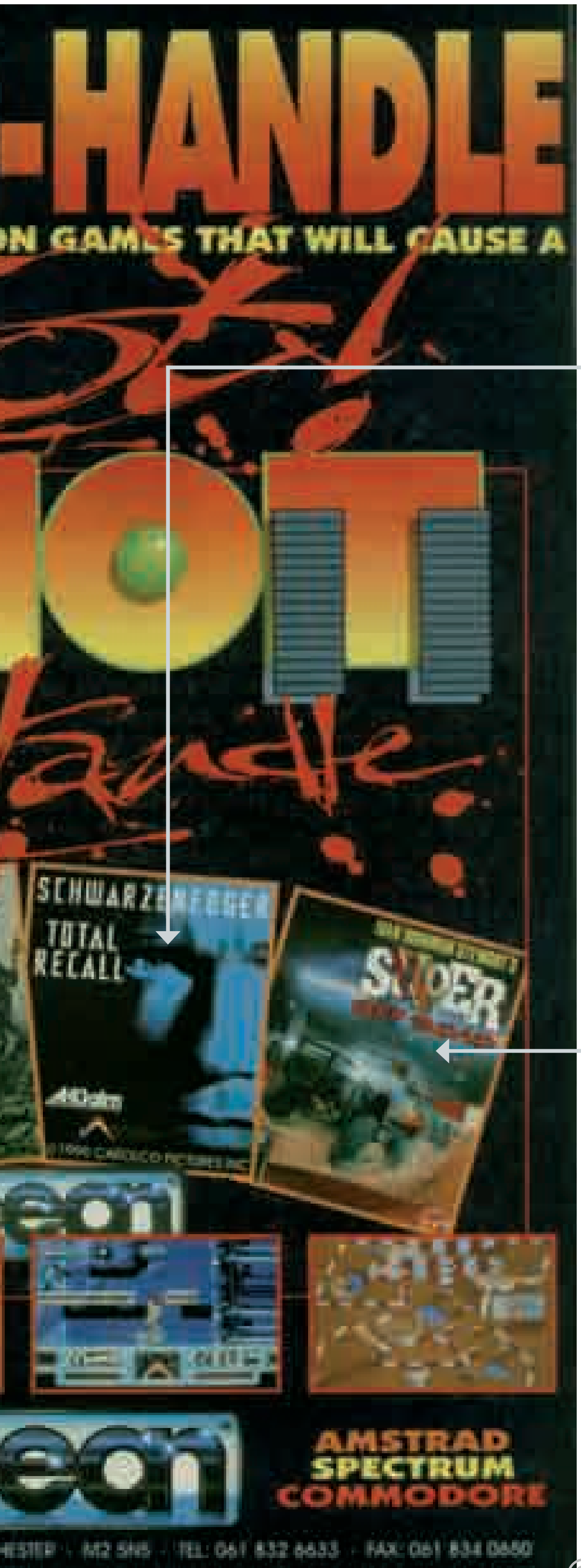


SHADOW WARRIORS

You can't really beat chunky graphics. From *Altered Beast* to the *Chiki Boys*, there's nothing more arcade-feeling than being the puppeteer of a strutting mound of punching beef (*Last Battle* the exception). Well, *Shadow Warriors* (or *ShadWar* for short) is one such game. The Western name for *Ninja Gaiden*, *Shadow Warriors* is a side-scrolling, move-up-and-down-if-you-wish ninja fighter. The pull here though is that you can fully interact with your environment. Yup, straight up, you can swing from signage; backwards flip from park benches like a drunk circus tramp. You could probably even enter a telephone box, ring for a pizza, wait for the pizza delivery guy to turn up and then fight him using the pizza as a giant doughy shuriken. And if that wasn't enough interaction for you, some stages even had interactive backgrounds that saw careless drivers try to mow you down in between the fights. This 8-bit classic still looks great today, the action is fluid and galloping throughout and it marks a great little addition to this pack.

TRIVIA *Young Master* is the best Jackie Chan film ever made.

MAG RATING 74% *Crash:* "Outstandingly colourful conversion of more ninja antics – tough on play."

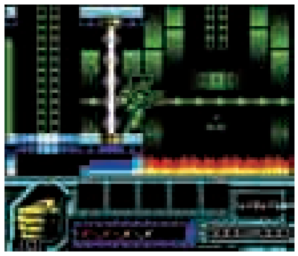


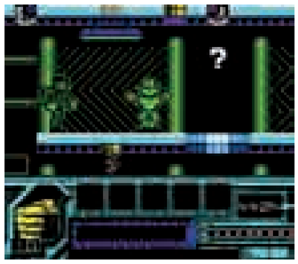
TOTAL RECALL

I was thinking the other day, while observing a finch delicately sup water from a lake, that Arnie has to be the most computerised actor in the world? *Red Heat, The Running Man, Last Action Hero* and this. I can't think of a thespian that's appeared in more crappy games. The 8-bit computer ports of *Total Recall* give you three pendulous boobies to gawp at over the atrocious NES version – which simply exposes a hairy man-chest covered in nits. This version has gloriously chunky visuals that act out in brilliant futuristic levels – housing force fields, lifts and, of course, deadly spikes – and is permeated by quirky driving sections. The only niggling factor is the game's somewhat skittish controls mean it's quite easy to die, but you are treated to a neat death scene to dampen the frustration: Arnie's head blowing up like a balloon and exploding. Thanks Ocean, thanks for actually investing a couple of hours of the development schedule to actually watch the flippin' movie, and not do an Interplay and just assume that the entire film was about punching pink midgets in dustbins.

TRIVIA The movie has a body count of: 77, that's 77 people getting blown up by the way, not 77 people appearing in the flick.

MAG RATING *Your Sinclair* 84%: "A great game, but not quite as big as 'Big' Arnie himself."



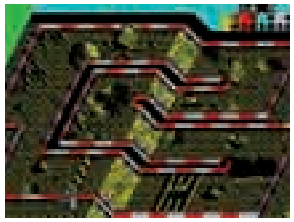


IVAN 'IRONMAN' STEWART'S SUPER OFF ROAD

I was a massive lover of Atari's *Badlands* in the arcade. It was an ancient, beat-up cab by the time I discovered it though, but what drew me to its delights was that it only asked for 10 pennies a play. For a funds-lacking teenager, finding a 10p arcade machine was like finding a nice patch of untainted grass with goalposts, or a tennis court that actually had a net and court markings. Well, I'd always stretch for a few goes of *Badlands* on a trip to the arcade, and when the home port was released I was mighty excited – that was until I actually got my hands on it. The futuristic dour dystopian environments of the arcade had been replaced with boring black Scalextric tracks, and the *Mad Max* motors had been exchanged for splodges of colour floating around the tracks like *Micro Machines* ghosts. Not good. But just as I was beginning to think that the superlative *Badlands* gameplay, which I enjoyed in the arcades, would never be replicated in the home, another game, with an unnecessarily lengthy title, was released. Ahh, this was much better. Fluid animation, tracks with bumps and ramps to whizz from, plus a great two-player mode. It might not have had the exciting futuristic back story of *Badlands*, but *Super Off Road* certainly looked and played light years ahead of all the competition.

TRIVIA In 1973, Ivan Stewart was scheduled to co-drive in the Ensenada 300. His co-driver broke his leg, so Stewart drove the car and won the race.

MAG RATING *Sinclair User* 92%: "The best overhead racing game about and a must for all racing fans."





22% OUT OF 22.22

Overall: By adding all the scores above, multiplying that by the number of pages in the magazine and then dividing the total by the number of pages that have a high ratio of white ink, we've come up with a more accurate method of rating the packs.



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

AFTER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY OF UNPARALLELED SUCCESS, EA HAS COME FULL CIRCLE. WHILE THE GLOBAL GIANT CONCENTRATES ITS ENERGIES INTO A FOUR-PRONGED REBRAND, MIKE TOOLEY TAKES A LOOK BACK AT THE COMPANY THAT BLAZED THROUGH THE EIGHTIES, REDEFINED GAMING IN THE NINETIES, AND MADE MOVIE LICENCES A WORTHWHILE ENDEAVOUR RIGHT UP TO THE PRESENT DAY

Electronic Arts (PART 1 OF 3)

Glance at any gaming or retro gaming forum and you'd be hard pushed to find even the merest mention of Electronic Arts. Get past the casual consumer and you'll find an apathy for EA that is equal to the love that Nintendo embraces. A good analogy for this would be *The Life Of Brian*'s, "What have the Romans ever done for us?" Now replace Romans with Electronic Arts and answer honestly, try to imagine gaming without EA, it would be a travesty. EA is more important to gaming than Nintendo, Sega, Sony and Microsoft because if it wasn't there, nobody else would be, at least, not on the same scale. Electronic Art's reach is as expansive as it is veiled; its grasp of present and future-generation technologies is unrivalled and at its heart beats the greatest game development roster in the world.

EA was the realisation of a seven-year ideal held by its founder Trip Hawkins. Trip demonstrates this ideal when he tells us, "I grew up in the golden age of TV. From the moment I saw my first computer in 1972, I knew I wanted to make videogames. I loved to play and had a strong feeling that it was good for me and that people were meant to interact, not sit passively in front of the 'boob tube'. I was already designing board games, but saw that a computer would allow me to put 'real life in a box,' a phrase which was oft repeated by the press in the early EA days."

He continues, "In 1975 I learned that the first retail store dedicated to



Everyone should play *Archon*, a combination of chess and a *Dungeons & Dragons*-type RPG.



Electronic Arts does the platforming thing with *Hard Hat Mack*.

EA INSTANT EXPERT

ELECTRONIC ARTS

Electronic Arts was first founded in 1982 and was originally called Amazin Games

Dr J and Larry Bird Go One On One was the first time celebrities were licensed to appear in games.

Electronic Art's first million selling title wasn't actually a game at all, but Will Harvey's superb Music Construction Set

EA turned off supply to Centresoft in 1987, meaning Boots couldn't stock their games, as EA took over more and more companies the ailing chemist would leave the games market altogether.

EA refuted the value of budget software in the eighties, Trip Hawkings predicated at the PCW in 1987 that Firebird, Codemasters and Mastertronic would all move over to full price software or cease to be.

EA replaced Accolade as the number one software producer in US within 18 months of being founded, US Gold had no interest in EA games when Trip approached them, the deal went to Ariolasoft for European distribution.

Time magazine ran a feature on Electronic Arts in 1986. It not only focussed on its packaging but also on the way that developers were treated like rock stars.

1989 is the only year that a new John Madden game hasn't been released, instead 1988's version was brought up to date and repackaged for the console market.

EA signed a long term Lord Of The Rings licensing deal back in 1988. The games they made under licence impressed the Tolkein's descendants so much that when the lucrative licences needed renewing in the nineties after the movies were made, EA was a cert to receive it.

EA were the first games company to install game producers, and give credit to games authors. Their early business model emulated Chaplin's United Artists so closely that it was almost called Electronic Artists.

computers had opened and that Intel was going to put a computer on a chip. I decided that I should start my own videogame software company in 1982. By then, I figured, there would be enough hardware in homes to support a game software company. But I had some things I needed to do first: finish school, learn how to make computer software, learn how to run a business, and help sell some hardware into homes so that my software could have some customers." For many, such precociousness is left behind as childhood dreams find themselves juxtaposed to harsh realities of teenage years, but Trip fashioned a journey through life that would see him realise his goals. "In the intervening seven years, I customised my Harvard studies and graduated magna cum laude with the first 'videogame' degree," he explains. "Formally it was called a degree in Strategy and Applied Game Theory. But I was programming videogames. One of my first was a 1973 football simulation written in BASIC for a PDP-11 mini-computer with time-sharing video displays, foreshadowing *Madden* and EA Sports. I then got an MBA at Stanford while writing the first major market research study of the Personal Computer, attending the first West Coast Computer Faire, and also doing research for Fairchild on the Channel F, the first console. I went to work at Apple in 1978 and helped grow the company from $2 million in revenue to $1 billion and from 50 employees to 4,000 in four years."

So it would have come as little surprise to those that knew him when Trip resigned from Apple and his post as director of product marketing to gamble everything on his beliefs. "On 1 January 1982, I resigned from Apple because I wanted to stay on the schedule I'd conceived seven years earlier," says Trip. "I felt late, because of the success of Atari's early hardware and a cottage industry of Apple II software companies, I counted 135 already making videogames. But I had a unique vision and thought I could become one of the leaders. This is what happens after you hang around with Steve Jobs for a few years!"

So it was, that on 28 May 1982 Amazin' Games was incorporated. Trip's odyssey wouldn't be a solo venture either, Rich Melmon would join in August 1982, and was quickly followed by Dave Evans and Pat Marriott who had left Apple, such was their belief in Trip. Trip would later refer to them as 'producers', the first time that gaming had recognised development processes. By November the head count had swollen further, and with the eventual arrival of Tim Mott, Bing Gordon, David Maynard and Steve Hayes bolstering an already forward-thinking and talented workforce everything was in place for a stellar launch. Many of the new intakes weren't happy with the name, and so committee selected a new name. After much debate, Electronic Arts was settled on. The team viewed games as art and felt that this encapsulated all they were about. Electronic Arts was to be to videogames everything that United Artists was to movies, the original business plan was to aim squarely at getting games straight to market through direct selling, bringing together small independent programmers and gaining them mass exposure under one brand. Let the artist be known for their work was the mantra.

The fledgling EA scoured the States looking for the best-unsigned games, in the same way that an AR executive might court a new rock act. "I remember sweating profusely in the heat with Anne Westfall at Jon Freeman's (who were the first to sign for EA as Freefall Associates) house in summer 1982, and hooking up with Dan Bunten from Arkansas, and



The EA motley crew completely redesigned gaming in the Eighties.

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Trip Hawkins

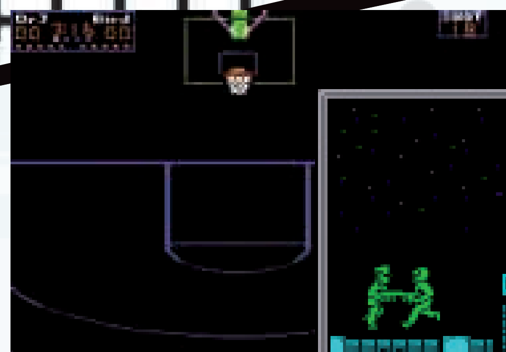
Outspoken and slightly egocentric, there is just no denying that Trip Hawkins is a genius. In a remarkable interview with Crash in 1986 he described a future for gaming that was almost impossible to imagine. The fact that everything he said has happened since, just illustrates the understanding that he has for the gaming industry. (You can read the interview here www.crashonline.org.uk/46/pcw_ea.htm)

When the director of product marketing leaves Apple for a start-up, and then sees his new start-up turn in over a million dollars per annum, you may be forgiven for thinking that would be it.

But from EA Trip moved on to 3DO, describing this as "a gradual accident. I intended 3DO to be a sister company and to remain involved with both, but they evolved on separate arcs and I felt obligated to keep 3DO alive. By the time it became necessary to split, of course it was difficult, like choosing between a healthy teenage son and a baby that was in surgery." He would remain at 3DO until the company finally filed for bankruptcy in 2003. Since then Trip has formed a new company called Digital Chocolate, when asked to compare his new venture with his old, he tells us, "I've been far more successful as an international business with Digital Chocolate. Digital Chocolate even does something I never thought possible at EA – we make the highest quality mobile games but we do a lot of the work in places like Finland and India." And for Trip, who recently celebrated Digital Chocolate's 3,000,000th download, the future is clear, "The mobile phone has turned into 'The Social Computer'. Mobile phones are becoming ubiquitous computers that keep people connected to their virtual villages. I founded Digital Chocolate to help people get more out of their social lives and mobile lifestyles using these computer networks." The future's bright, the future's…



Ⓐ *Demon Stalkers* was very similar to *Gauntlet*, but *Gauntlet* never played this badly.



Ⓐ *One On One* was the first ever licensed sports game featuring Dr J and Larry Bird.



Ⓑ It's hard to imagine that some computers struggled with the intense graphics of a comic.

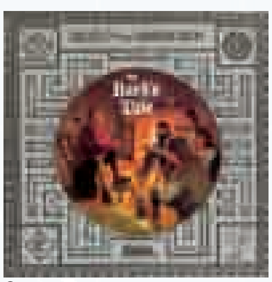
sitting on my balcony in Portola Valley trying to convince Bill Budge to join," remembers Trip. "Finally, I literally had to beg him, telling him that without him on board there was no point in my starting the company and that it couldn't make it without him. I trained my producers and sent them out to get more product action. As an example, one of them said they'd heard the name of a great game developer in Illinois but had no idea how to find him. I simply told them to find out all of the area codes for the State and to call every directory assistance number for every area code and to call every guy with that name. And it worked."

Away from the sourcing of products and hard-nosed selling to retailers, Tim Mott led a team that built Artist Work Stations (AWS). Trip's vision was that recording artists got to have a recording studio and instruments, so Electronic Arts should create similar leverage to make the best games with the best production values. In that process, it already had the staff with the right skills and ideas, so it set about developing game design tools to aid the fledgling community, allowing designers to make their ideas flesh. First seen commercially in Cut & Paste, a simple word processor designed by Tim Mott, and Financial Cookbook, a consumer finance tool designed by Trip, EA had already set itself apart from the other games companies of the day. Dan Silva joined soon after and created a paint box program for EA's growing ensemble of artists. The tool proved to be so user friendly and comprehensive that Tim sold Trip on the commercial viability of his idea, and the product eventually went to retail as Deluxe Paint. Deluxe Paint would go on to become one of the Eighties most successful creative tools, evolving into a series, it would become the standard computer art tool for a generation.

The similarity to the music industry didn't end there. Each game would come in the form of an album; gatefolded, it would open out displaying a full credits listing, a biography of the artists that had created the game and a full-colour instruction manual. Each release would be backed up by an advertising campaign that consisted of lavishly produced magazine advertisements, featuring staff photos taken by a rock album cover photographer over the course of an all-day photoshoot. Under the guidance of art director Nancy L Fong, EA would stand out from the crowd from the beginning, so much so that in June 1983 *Time Magazine* would run a feature on the way EA was reshaping the gaming landscape. All this coverage and the games had only just started to arrive, but what games they were.

First out of the EA stable were Michael Abbot and Matthew Alexander's *Hard Hat Mack*, (the first time the now famous EA cube, circle and triangle would feature on a cover). *Archon* from Freefall Associates and Ozark Softscape's ground-breaking *M.U.L.E.* would bring up the rear.

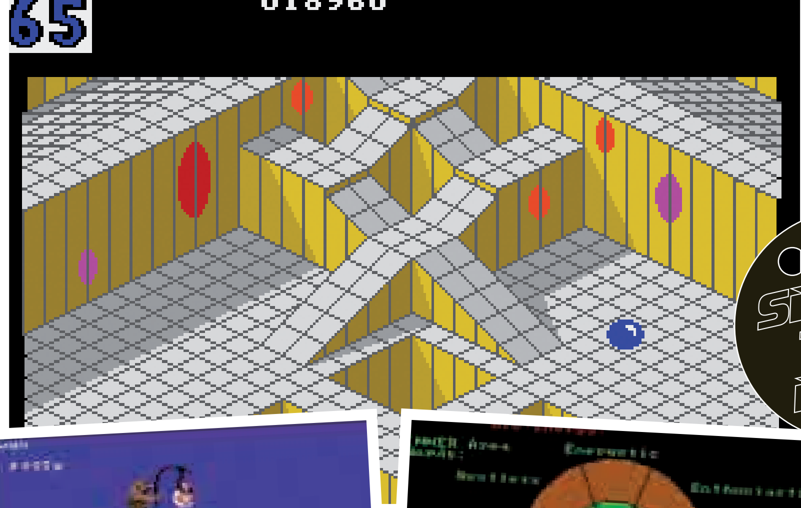
Bill Budge's *Pinball Construction Set* would follow soon after, created using the in-house game tools; the first time gamers could create their own games without any coding knowledge. All were originally released for the Atari 800, but Apple II and C64 versions soon followed. This was a heady time for EA, the first time it had something tactile after almost 12 months of hard-selling ideas to retail. Trip recalls this period as one of the most notable for EA, such was the clamour for its software, "We took all 22 employees to our warehouse in May 1983, to pack and ship out our first orders." From CEO to admin, everyone mucked in to ensure retail got what it wanted. Demand for EA games was massive and with Ariolasoft distributing for EA in Europe it would only grow.

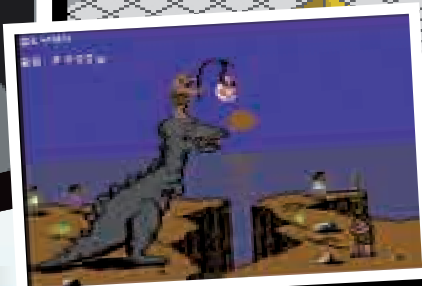


Ⓐ *The Bard's Tale* was an awesome RPG, and the sequel wasn't at all bad either.

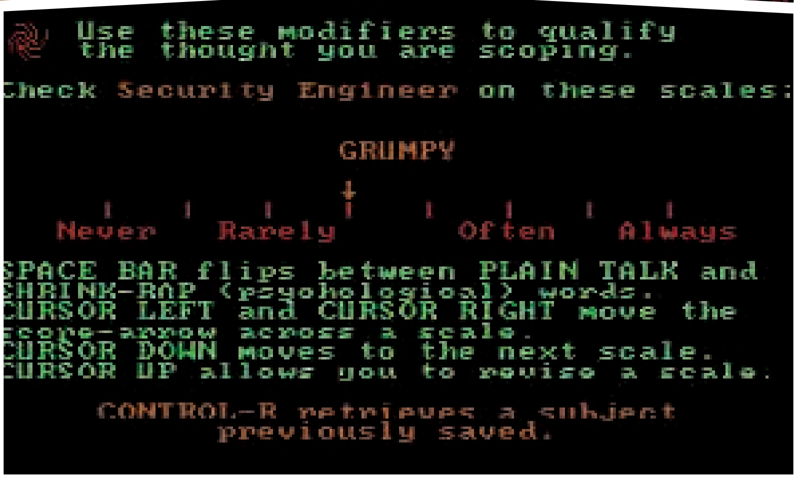


Ⓐ *Heart of Africa* is the unofficial follow-up to *The Seven Cities of Gold*.









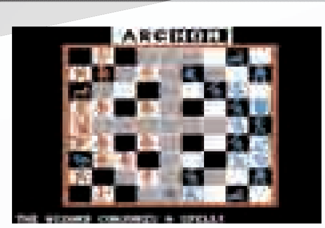
How *Mind Mirror* ever came to become an actual computer game is anyone's guess.

Six of the Best



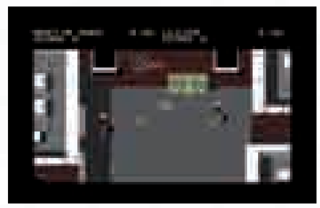
M.U.L.E. 1983

The first time that a truly multiplayer experience was realised at home. *M.U.L.E.* saw four players face off against each other to become the founder of a colony planet. Always four players, with or without friends, the game is noted for its great use of supply-and-demand economics, and plays like a four-player game of chess. *M.U.L.E.* is as good today as it was back then.



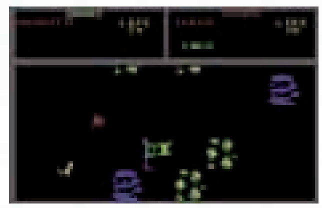
Archon 1984

Developed by Freefall Associates, *Archon* truly was a revolution in its day. The premise was chess goes *Dungeons & Dragons*. But it felt as much like a role-playing game as it did like a game of chess. In *Archon* moving on to an occupied square didn't remove a piece, but instead it started a one-on-one combat cycle, which was truly awesome. The sequel was no slouch either.



Skate Or Die! 1987

Skate Or Die! took the previous year's *California Games*, and made a complete game from its strongest event. Made by the same team, it cashed in on the resurgence in skateboarding as a culture. A variety of parks were available, perform well, and repeat ad infinitum. Well received, it was the C64 that stood out, thanks to some of Rob Hubbard's finest work.



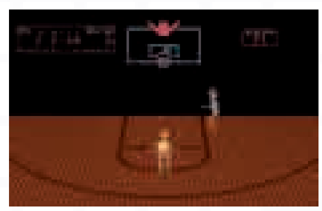
Mail Order Monsters 1985

What do you do after redesigning chess? For Paul Reiche III and Evan and Nicky Robinson the answer was easy, make dreams come. Build a monster, add weapons, save to disk, and take it to your friend's and battle with their homegrown monsters. European gamers only got to play the rather awesome single-player game due to a lack of disk drives. Shame.



The Bard's Tale II 1986

The sequel to the acclaimed *Bard's Tale* sees the addition of ranged weapons such as bows and catapults. The player's quest is to find and re-forge the seven pieces of the broken destiny wand that will restore peace to the realm. A forerunner to the *Dungeon Master* games, this is storytelling par excellence. Watch out for the brilliant ending, bet you didn't see that coming.



Dr J And Larry Bird Go One On One 1983

This 1983 classic is not only a superb basketball game, it was also the first time that a real personality starred in a videogame, giving birth to videogame licensing. The game plays as a series of challenges to find the greatest player, an early glimpse of what EA would become perhaps, but a very lucrative quality franchise for EA regardless.

Even the effervescent, incredibly confident Mr Hawkins couldn't have hoped for more. *Pinball Construction Set* was the real hit of the bunch and topped multiformat charts on both sides of the Atlantic, making a star out of Bill Budge at the same time. The second wave of EA releases would prove even more popular.

First to come after the initial launch was *Dr J And Larry Bird Go One On One*, released late that same year and developed by Eric Hammond. Trip had direct involvement in the game's design and remembers this time as a genesis for two new genres. "I had designed my first sports game in 1971, using cards and dice," he says. "I'd always wanted to make computer sports games, and in 1983 I got this process started at EA by conceiving and designing the first of what would become EA Sports, *Dr J And Larry Bird Go One On One*. This was actually the first videogame in which celebrities appeared as themselves, which of course became a mainstay trend. I personally lined up the developer, producer and got the athletes signed, and the programming took place about ten feet away from where I sat." A much easier sell Stateside than in Europe, the game still sold well on both sides of the Atlantic.

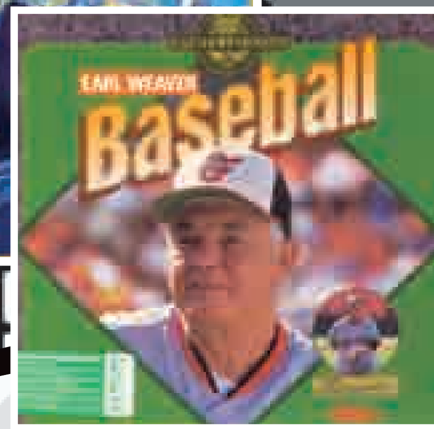
But it wasn't about the game verbatim, more that two fledgling genres had emerged that would define EA for the short and long-term future.

Despite its early success it wouldn't be until 1984 and Will Harvey's Music Construction Set that EA would achieve its first million selling title. Only to be outdone a year later when Rick Koenig took the series further with the *Racing Destruction Set*, which outsold both of its predecessors, EA, without looking had stumbled across its first franchise. With three years and three games under the same banner, 1984 would prove to be an exceptional year for EA, but for other reasons. The existing software line-up continued to sell, the more formats the games were converted to, the more money EA made, but more significantly for the company longer term, however, was that when production of *One On One* had been completed, Trip used all his learnings to sketch out a new sports game. "I immediately moved onto a much more ambitious design for my favourite sport, football, and brought John Madden on board," he says. "I designed the game and met with Madden several times to get his input, including a two-day trip on the train. *Madden Football* was very late in development and became known around EA as 'Trip's folly.' Everyone thought the project should be killed. The accountants insisted that all the money, including Madden's advance, be written off as unrecoupable. But I'm a determined fellow and eventually got it right." This meant that EA was turning producer as well as publisher, the design tools had helped this culture to grow organically and with Trip working night and day on *Madden*, and the green light being given to start development on EA in-house titles, Trip needed help. From a standing start EA had seen turnover rise from $5m to $11m in two years, in 1985 the forecast was $18m and so at the 11th hour Larry Probst was brought in as CEO of sales, with Probst running sales and dealing

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK







Ⓐ E A has licenced several well-known sports celebrities for its sports game. Earl Weaver entered the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1996.

Ⓐ *The Bard's Tale* series proved to be an extremely popular franchise for EA, which makes you wonder why EA hasn't resurrected the franchise. It would work brilliantly on the DS.



Ⓐ *Mail Order Monsters* could be the greatest game you've never played.



Ⓐ Who would have thought EA would bring it home in 1983?

with the retailers, Hawkins was free to work on the business and develop his ideas without the day-to-day nuances and distractions of a very rapidly expanding business.

Along with games and utility software for the home, by 1985 EA had also started making software for schools and colleges dubbed 'Crash Courses'. These courses proved assailable for the average student and prompted a renewed interest in their studies. 1985 wasn't a difficult year for EA, the hard work had been done in the previous years, with *Starflight*, *The Bard's Tale* and *Mail Order Monsters* setting the gaming press alight and delighting gamers, while sequels to previous works were released to suitably strong sales. Larry would concentrate on refining the sales model for EA and studying the gaming trends and distribution models in Europe, while Trip would return to his opus, the as yet without moniker *John Madden Football*.

For Trip, the realisation of EA was a dream, using EA to develop *Madden* was a licence to have Christmas everyday. "My friends would tell you that EA was really created by me as an excuse to make a football game, and this is not far from the truth," he admits. "My goal, as always, was the verisimilitude, the authenticity. I knew football, but wanted professional help. First I went to a local coach, Joe Kapp, but when he asked for his name on the game and royalties, I thought if I had to do that I should just go to the top of the food chain. Madden was starring in TV ads and was already a great broadcaster, so I knew he was in the public eye, so I picked him and called his agent. After we signed the deal, Joe Ybarra and I flew to Denver with programmer Robin Antonick and an assistant, we met him at the train station and came west for two days on the train. I had already produced a 60-page design and I took John through it and asked him thousands of questions. Later he gave me one of his Raider's playbooks and introduced us to sports journalist Frank Cooney. John helped with myriad details, but I had to do the heavy lifting, including drawing up the 150 plays and organising every detail of the game, including rosters. Cooney helped with the rosters and John would meet with us periodically to correct errors. The way he would do this would go like this, when Robin Antonick mistakenly put the fullback behind a guard: 'What the f*ck is this? I f*cking told you already that this f*cking guy lines up behind the f*cking tackle? What the f*ck is he doing here?'" remembers Trip.

Overbearing NFL commentators weren't all Trip had to concern himself with either, which may allay the delays in *Madden*'s development somewhat.

In 1986 the decision was made that EA would go it alone in Europe. Making the announcement at the January 1987 CWS in London, to outline EA's intent to leave behind its distribution deal with Ariolasoft and to set up a base in Europe. Back in the States EA had long left Activision behind in the sales charts to become the number one publisher; Europe would be a different beast. Not for the first time, EA would enter the battleground in a blaze of controversy. Despite CRL and Nexus already being part of EA, gamers in Europe didn't realise this. *Crash* magazine ran a scathing, patronising report of the exclusive interview that Trip had given them. Barnaby Page said, "Electronic Arts – the very name suggests William

EA TIMELINE 1965-1989

1965 TRIP REALISES THAT HE COULD 'LEARN BY DOING' AND IS MORE STIMULATED BY PLAYING BOARD GAMES THAN READING OR WATCHING TELEVISION

1968 HE BECOMES INTERESTED IN DESIGNING SPORTS GAMES WITH REAL PLAYERS, STATS AND STRATEGIES AFTER DISCOVERING STRAT-O-MATIC

1970 TRIP FINDS PHILOSOPHER JOHN DEWEY, WHICH SPURS HIS VIEW OF USING GAMES TO LEARN THROUGH PLAY AND SIMULATION

1971 HE DESIGNS AND MAKES HIS FIRST SIMULATION GAME USING CARDS, CHARTS AND DICE

1972 HE USES PDP-8, HIS FIRST COMPUTER, AND REALISES HE CAN FULFIL HIS GAMING DREAMS BY 'PUTTING REAL LIFE IN A BOX' (EG LET THE COMPUTER DO THE WORK OF SIMULATION)

1973 HE BEGINS PROGRAMMING COURSES AT HARVARD; PROGRAMS A FOOTBALL SIMULATION GAME AND DEVELOPS IDEAS FOR OTHER GAMES

1974 CREATES CUSTOM MAJOR IN 'STRATEGY AND APPLIED GAME THEORY'

1975 LEARNS ABOUT MICROPROCESSOR AND THE COMPUTER STORE AND DECIDES TO START HIS OWN GAME SOFTWARE FIRM IN 1982

1977 DOES CONSOLE GAME RESEARCH WITH FAIRCHILD ON HIS GAME IDEAS; BEGINS WORK ON FIRST MAJOR PUBLISHED STUDY OF PERSONAL COMPUTER INDUSTRY, PUBLISHED BY CSI; SEES DEBUT OF APPLE II AT WC COMPUTING FAIRE; VISITS HIS FIRST BYTE SHOP

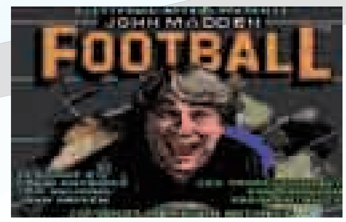
1978 JOINS APPLE AND GETS HIS FIRST PC (APPLE II) AND PROGRAMS SOME GAMES FOR IT, AND BEGINS TO DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH GAME DEVELOPERS

SIX TO MISS



Demon Stalkers 1987

A cerebral *Gauntlet*, this top-down adventure-'em-up had a hundred levels, but was pretty poorly received upon its release. The game's ambition ultimately proved to be its undoing. The mazes were fierce, some even taking place over multiple-levels. In the end solving puzzles at a frenetic pace left gamers cold.



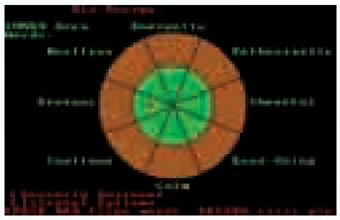
John Madden Football 1989

Using plays taken from Madden's playbook from his time as Oakland Raiders' coach, this was Trip's opus. The detail was overwhelming for the casual gamer, with plays taking five minutes to get in motion. With poor graphics and a clunky interface, the first *Madden* is nothing more than a curio as to the genesis of EA's biggest sports franchise.



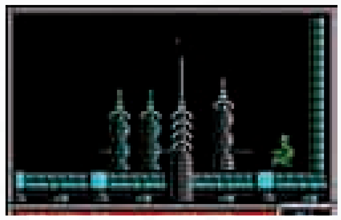
Marble Madness 1986

The arcade monster found its way home through EA. A game relying on a track ball, incredible visuals and custom-made sound hardware, was never going to make an easy transition to the home. The C64 has the truest to the arcade port. Why EA thought the Spectrum's rubber keyoard could emulate is anyone's guess, because it couldn't.



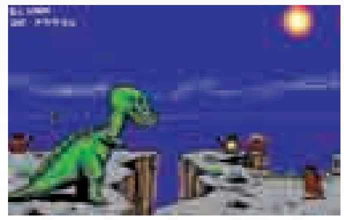
Timothy Leary's Mind Mirror 1985

"Turn on, tune in, drop out," made the man famous to our parents and their Woodstock generation. If anyone ever needed an illustration of the damage hallucinogens might cause, then this is surely it. Have a thought, type it in, compare it to another thought and see what other people are thinking about your thought. Think about it.



Dan Dare: Pilot Of The Future 1986

The Eagle lands in videogame form, a great game that was different on all formats. But the Spectrum version is a shambles. Gone are the lush visuals of the C64 and CPC versions, replaced by shrunken green sprites that are unidentifiable as characters from the comic. A rare find, to see how bad a good game can be on the wrong format.



Caveman Ugh-lympics 1988

A spin-off of the Olympics featuring cavemen and the spectator sports that used to play to a packed Stonehenge for the merriment of our Neanderthal ancestors. The events are very limited and over very quickly and with only six events in total, the most joy to be had from the game comes when you stave it of power.

"FOR TRIP, THE REALISATION OF EA WAS A DREAM, USING EA TO DEVELOP MADDEN WAS A LICENCE TO HAVE CHRISTMAS EVERYDAY"

M 'Trip' Hawkins, 33, founder, president and pundit. His expansive talk and his expanding corporation, which officially launched its European operation at The PCW Show, are shot through with an American approach to games software: the programmers are artists (his word), the products are elaborate and finely tuned coffee-table C64-oriented jobs, many of them sophisticated battle/vehicle/sports simulations or adventure/role-playing games (RPGs). So, possible EA Spectrum titles include *Apollo 18: Mission To The Moon*, *Chessmaster 2000* (superchess), *Skate Or Die!*, *Lords Of Conquest* (super *Risk*), *Test Drive* and *Train Escape* ('more than just the greatest fast action arcade fun', apparently) as well as some more soothing sports sims, *Mini-Putt* and *World Tour Golf*. It all sounds rather cool, calm, professional; not crazy at all; grown-up, in fact."

Headed by David Gardner and Mark Lewis, it wouldn't take long for EOA (a Welsh company owned the EA name until 1997 in the UK) to make its mark despite the rather negative response that the British gaming press seemed to exude towards the company. In 1987 *Skate Or Die!* was released to the masses, a skateboarding game based on the bestselling *California Games*, written by the same Epyx team, in fact. EOA looked like a new company, and as *Skate Or Die!* was the first internally produced game to be released proper, Gardner and Lewis milked the 'what a debut' accolades for all they were worth. EOA followed this by publishing the seminal *Populous* the next year and then acquiring Bullfrog.

Stateside, Trip had finally finished *Madden*, released in late 1988 for Apple II, it revitalised the machine, and subsequent ports would arrive throughout 1989. In five years, EA had gone from being a one-man publisher, to a globe-striding corporation. The games industry was generally healthy, albeit a bit stale, and there was plenty of competition for EA from US Gold, Ocean, Gremlin, Activision and the various console manufacturers. Trip always worked in the future and as the Eighties slipped towards history, an unlikely court case between Nintendo and Tengen would give him the angle and edge that would become EA's point of difference. More on that next month.



M.U.L.E. is still among the greatest multiplayer games ever made.

1979 WORKS WITH VERY TALENTED SOFTWARE ENGINEERS AT APPLE AND REALISES THEY WERE ARTISTS THAT COULD BE MANAGED, PROMOTED, AND COMPENSATED LIKE HOLLYWOOD MANAGES THEIR ARTISTS

1980 BECOMES FOUNDING BOARD MEMBER OF SSI TO LEARN COMPUTER GAME BUSINESS

1981 HE'S INVOLVED IN APPLE'S SHIFT FROM SELLING THROUGH DISTRIBUTORS TO DIRECT TO RETAILERS, AND REALISES HE WANTS TO SELL DIRECT TO RETAILERS, A RADICAL NOTION AT THAT TIME

1982 AMAZIN' GAMES FORMED AND CHANGES ITS NAME TO ELECTRONIC ARTS

1983 ELECTRONIC ARTS GIVES BIRTH TO CELEBRITY LICENCES BEYOND ENDORSEMENTS

1984 ELECTRONIC ARTS ACHIEVES ITS FIRST MILLION SELLING TITLE

1985 ELECTRONIC ARTS REPLACES ACCOLADE AS THE NUMBER ONE SOFTWARE PROVIDER IN THE US

1986 EA DELIVERS ITS FIRST FULL INTERNALLY PRODUCED TITLE SKATE OR DIE, THE GAME IS CENSORED FOR THE EUROPEAN RELEASE

1987 ELECTRONIC ARTS OPENS ITS EUROPEAN HEADQUARTERS IN THE UK, SEVERING TIES WITH ARIOLASOFT AND CHANGING UK GAME DISTRIBUTION FOREVER

1988 ELECTRONIC ARTS BUYS FLEDGLING DEVELOPERS BULLFROG

1989 EA REVERSE ENGINEERS THE SEGA MEGA DRIVE, THIS SMALL MOVE WILL CHANGE THE FACE OF GAMING FOR THE NEXT DECADE



JACKAL

Stuart's brothers-in-arms are hostages behind enemy lines and he's their only hope for freedom. But the fire power he will face to rescue them is going to be awesome. He'll need a pocket full of ten pence pieces, and the ferocity of a wild Jackal

After compiling our top 25 list of run-'n'-gun games for issue 44, there was one title that we continually ummed and ahed about adding to the list. *Jackal* can only really comfortably fall in among run-'n'-gun denizens, but there is a glaring factor about the game that, had we brushed it slyly under the carpet, would have caused the *Sunset Riders* to have a melodramatic hissy fit.

While there's plenty of gunning to be found throughout, its running aspect is supplanted seamlessly with driving, therefore demonstrating how an entire campaign can be won while perched comfortably in a chair and preventing it from joining our top 25 run-'n'-gunners. To its credit though, it's the game's blatant slothfulness that helps *Jackal* stand apart from the plethora of other arcade shooters that found themselves set inside a war.

With the safety of two green berets resting in your clammy hands, your men must battle through an enemy stronghold and participate in a daring search-and-rescue mission. Your captive

IN THE KNOW

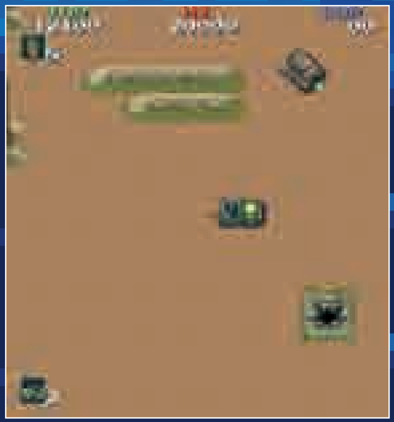


» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **GENRE:** RIDE-'N'-GUN
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £40+ (PCB BOARD)





» If your jeep gets it, it likes to draw attention to the fact by hamming it up with a big melodramatic death.



» The tanks are incredibly annoying, they chase you around like love-sick puppies.



» "Hey, that's a really nice paint job, white really compliments your, erm, arse?"



» Handily, the enemies have allotted you space to construct and decorate your own helipads on their land. How considerate.

comrades have been imprisoned inside plush-looking beach houses dotted around the level. And it's your job to level the buildings with a well-timed pineapple grenade, wait for the newly liberated to emerge and then drive them to a chopper for immediate extraction.

Of course, this mission will be no leisurely drive in the park; this is a Konami arcade game after all. The moment your squaddies touch down after a parachute jump and scramble frantically towards their jeep, the screen starts throwing up all manner of armed militia to blow you into smouldering scrap metal.

The worry, of course, by switching legs for wheels, is that precision and steering inside a smothered battlefield teeming with enemies will play out like topless paintball in a stairwell.

But worry not because the controls and collision detection in the game are completely bulletproof. The game's firing system might take you a while to get to grips with – you can only fire your primary weapon up the screen, while grenades and missiles can be fired in whichever direction your bonnet is facing – but it all adds to the frantic nature of the gameplay. Another unique aspect about *Jackal* is that because you're in a jeep you can scoot around the screen and mow down plodding militia.

The entire game is set out as one big lengthy level. There are no checkpoints or save points – despite there being some peculiar red flag markers on the Game Over progress map, which imply that there should be – only a vast stretch of enemy-dotted land and one credit's worth of life.

Yes, *Jackal* is one of those annoying one credit-at-a-time games that take no cash bribes. It won't drop its top and flash you its end screen for money – it's kind of like dating a preacher's daughter; only by getting to know the machine, understanding the little ticks and ultimately showing a genuine interest in it will you ever get past first base.

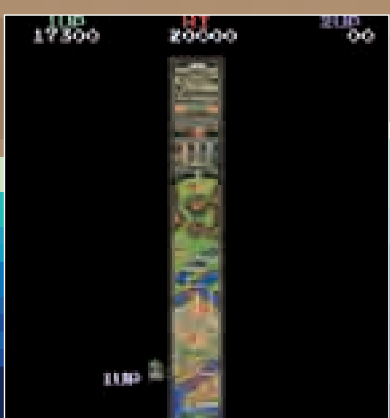
To help shift the scales of victory half a kilogram in your favour, any singular men that you liberate from prison will handily upgrade your secondary weapon. There are a total of four power-ups available for reclamation that can be built up throughout the game.

After collecting the missiles, the second power-up will help to increase the missiles' range. The third upgrade, 'spread rocket', will produce shrapnel-producing missiles and the final 'star rocket' will smother the impact area with damage when fired. As your jeep can only hold a maximum of eight men at any one time, it is often a good tactic to sweep up seven men and wisely leave an empty seat for any Billy No-Mates that you might encounter somewhere along the way.

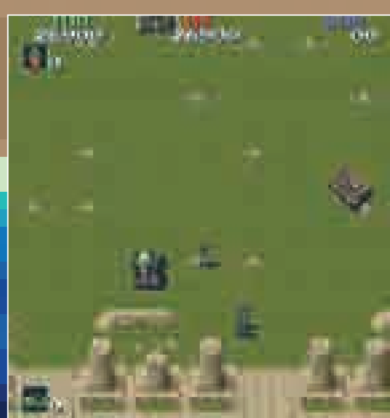
The beauty of *Jackal* is that you can opt to play it in two very different methods. You can either race around the screen concentrating solely on eradicating the enemy, leaving your men, in their chalet, to wallow in self-pity for all eternity, or you can shoot in and out of the combat to free your men, then exchange them for some well-needed extra lives, while racking up the points.

We would love to be able to shed some light on the final sections of *Jackal*, but unfortunately, we have only ever managed to run half of the insanely difficult gauntlet that Konami has laid down within *Jackal*. Thankfully, the game's fantastic NES port was a little bit more forgiving. It splits the action into clearly definable sections and is much easier on the pocket.

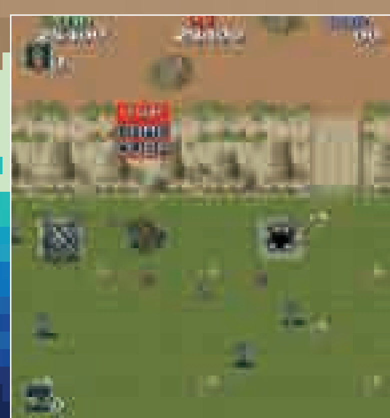
Jackal, however, is as addictive as they come. Whether it's the final level of *Halo*, or Snake and Meryl's escape at the climax of *Metal Gear Solid*; driving jeeps in the midst of chaos and gunfire has always been an exuberating experience. *Jackal* is an entire game dedicated to that very feeling.



» The world's longest and most perilous crazy golf course.



» And yet another typically generic arcade screenshot.



» "Aw shucks, and I only had about 400 miles left to go as well!"

"THE MOMENT YOUR SQUADDIES TOUCH DOWN AND SCRAMBLE FRANTICALLY TOWARDS THEIR JEEP, THE SCREEN STARTS THROWING UP ARMED MILITIAS TO BLOW YOU INTO SMOULDERING SCRAP METAL"

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CONTRA
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, VARIOUS 8-BITS, NINTENDO DS, NES
YEAR: 1987

JAIL BREAK (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, C64
YEAR: 1986

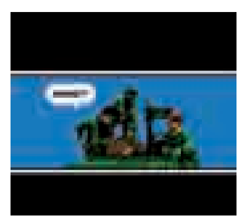
METAL GEAR SOLID
SYSTEMS: PLAYSTATION, PC
YEAR: 1998



JACK IN THE BOX

The NES port of *Jackal*, like most of Konami's NES ports (*Contra*, *Green Beret*) offers a great conversion of the arcade classic. Like *Green Beret*, Konami has opted to tweak the game slightly to make it a more balanced and structured game. Rather than set the entire game over one continuous level, Konami decided to split the action across six clearly distinguishable stages. The graphics in the game remain reasonably faithful to boot, and you even got a few comical cut-scenes thrown in for good comical measure.





RAMPAGE

"THEY DID THE MASH, THEY DID THE MONSTER MASH"



- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE ACTION
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SEGA MASTER SYSTEM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

It's always disheartening to hear Sega's Master System being dismissed as the little 8-bit console that nobody cared about, because it really was a cracking little console that sported some superb arcade conversions across a wide range of genres.

Take this excellent conversion of Midway's *Rampage*, for example. It might not boast the full three-player experience of the original coin-op and you could argue that the Lynx conversion – which came out a good two years later and sported a fourth character – was arguably superior, but at the time of its release Sega's effort was virtually untouchable when up against other versions of the time and managed to capture all the chaotic excitement of the hit arcade game.

Taking control of one of three transformed humans – George the Gorilla, Lizzie, a Godzilla wannabe and Ralph the Wolfman – you're required to smash your way across America, leaving the sort of destruction and devastation in your wake that would, no doubt, give insurers headaches for years to come. As your rampage continues, helicopters fly overhead and pepper you with bullets; soldiers pop out from windows and toss grenades towards you, while tanks pummel you from the ground. Luckily, smashing open buildings will reveal objects that can be eaten to replenish health, but make sure you jump clear before the demolished building collapses.

The Master System's colour palette does an excellent job of capturing the vibrancy of the original coin-op, while George and co are absolutely huge sprites and are brilliantly animated, capturing all the humour and subtle nuances seen in the arcade original.

Sure, there's a fair amount of flicker to be found, which is a little disheartening, but the conversion is so solid, and the action so fun that this little niggle soon becomes rather irrelevant.

Few games on Sega's Master System allowed you to create so much gleeful chaos, and while it's not the best arcade conversion to be found on the machine, it's still a stunning achievement.





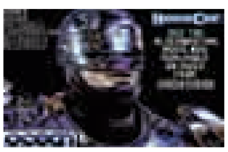
THE MAKING OF…

ROBOCOP

In 1988, Manchester-based Ocean Software released what would become the biggest home computer game of the Eighties. Part coin-op conversion and part unique movie licence, RoboCop smashed records across the multiformat charts and became the blueprint for movie tie-ins. Robert Mellor talks to Gary Bracey about producing one of the most legendary and successful titles of the era



IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1988/1989
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** AROUND £5-£10



With 8-bit micro versions released in 1988 and 16-bit ports the following year, Ocean Software's *RoboCop* became the quintessential videogame success story of the decade, subsequently putting the Mancunian software house firmly on the map and setting it up for many prolific and profitable years that reached well into the Nineties.

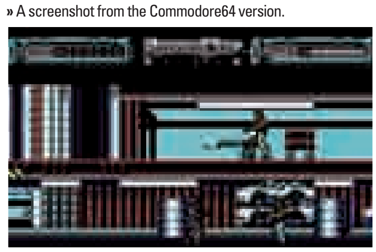
Having secured the electronic rights while the film itself was still considered an unknown quantity, Ocean produced a game that both converted Data East's monster coin-op hit and also added a sprinkling of originality to the game design. Pulsating action in the form of side-scrolling platform mayhem from the arcade was blended with puzzle and first-person shooter sub-games to create a diverse and faithful representation of the movie in a game that sold in the millions and topped the multiformat charts for what seemed like an eternity.

Ocean Software already had a track record with profitable film licences such as *Short Circuit* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* when the licence rights for *RoboCop* became available. As the company's former development director Gary Bracey explains, he knew that a futuristic sci-fi action film with a Detroit cyborg cop out for revenge would be the perfect material for a computer game. "Being the 'movie buff', these scripts always came to me (as I was the only person who would read the damn things)," he says. "I still have all the original scripts of movies like *RoboCop*, *Silence Of The Lambs*, etc. Anyway, I remember about ten years later, fellow exec Jon Woods showed me the *RoboCop* script he had kept for posterity. It had a yellow Post-it note on the cover on which I had scrawled, 'We should get this – it could be a winner!'"

"As far as I was concerned, the material was ideal for a videogame," he continues. "Science fiction, shooting, set pieces, etc. Also, the movie itself was quite low budget, which in turn allowed us to negotiate a very preferential deal. I think the guarantee we paid (for worldwide rights on all electronic formats) was in the tens of thousands." As the game went into production, the film was just hitting cinemas and starting to become a global phenomenon, as Gary recalls, "I loved the movie. The success of the film was a little bit of a surprise as we did take a flyer on it. The fact that the director was unknown, as were the cast, made it speculative at best. The script wasn't exactly a masterpiece of modern literature, but it did have the same gritty feel that *Blade Runner* had… which meant that if it had been made well it stood a pretty good chance of making its mark. It was and it did."

Although on the surface a generic genre piece, and sold on its ultra-violent

» A screenshot from the Commodore64 version.

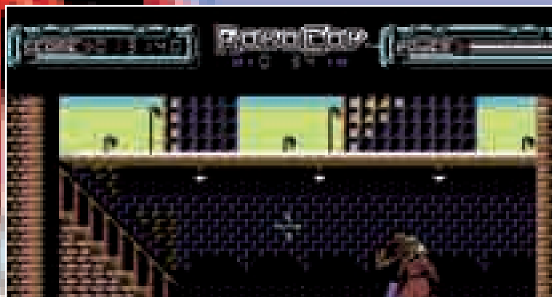




» These bonus stages were a diverting distraction from the main action.



» As ED-209 stomps on screen Robocop suddenly remembers he's left the iron on.


» Time it correctly and you can actually shoot this perp in the short and curlies.


» The arcade game may not have been as cerebral as its 8-bit peers, but it did look nice.

sci-fi action, the film itself has gone on to be praised for its more cerebral elements and underlying metaphor and allegory – specifically its Americanisation of the Bible. Gary, however, explains that this element was never really a factor when opting for the licence rights. "Not that analytical, I'm afraid," he explains. "It was evaluated on the entertainment value and what the demographic would be. Basically, you take a science-fiction action film and (back then, at least) you have pretty much the same audience as that for computer games. The subtleties and subtext were immaterial as they wouldn't translate into game elements anyway."

With the rights acquired, it was a bizarre twist of fate that would bring an arcade machine manufacturer to a software company when Data East sought to sub-licence the title from Ocean in order to create its own arcade game. This would result in the rather ironic occurrence of Data East crediting Ocean Software on the Attract mode for its *RoboCop* coin-op – which Ocean would then go on to convert. Gary details the specifics to this somewhat unique event, "At the time, I wasn't directly involved in the Data East deal – that was Jon Woods and David Ward. They already had a relationship with that company as I think Ocean may have licensed a coin-op game from them earlier. When *RoboCop* came up, then we acquired all the worldwide electronic rights so Data East sub-licensed the coin-op and pinball rights from us. Cannily, they also negotiated the rights for us to convert the coin-op game. As a side note, the then-CEO of Data East was Ray Musci who went on to become President of Ocean Of America a few years later."

When Ocean's own interpretation eventually went into development, Gary divulges that neither Orion, Paul Verhoeven nor the other film-makers were as protective over their intellectual property as Warner Brothers was with *Batman* the following year, "We had the usual approvals process, but they weren't very precious about the property at the time (not in the way Warner was with *Batman*, for instance)." With the film being an American production and principal photography taking place in Texas, the on-set access Ocean would experience in 1989 for *Batman: The Movie* was out of the question. It was, however, gifted with some very useful reference material. "We did get a little video footage prior to the film release," says Gary. "However, keep in mind that as we were basing our game on that of Data East's then we never needed such reference. Data East visited the set a couple of times, I think, and were given access to pre-release footage and stills. The coolest thing I saw was the original uncut scene of Murphy's death (the triggering event that leads to him becoming *RoboCop*). It was mega-graphic for those days and substantially cut/edited when it finally hit theatres. I guess it was restored for the inevitable 'Director's Cut' DVD."

As would be the case with his high-profile film tie-in in 1989, Gary himself was very close to the project of *RoboCop* and had a commendable slice of input


» Another boss from the arcade version that ended up appearing in the Amiga conversion.


» Don't be fooled by the bright colous, *Robocop* was just as violent as its arcade peer.

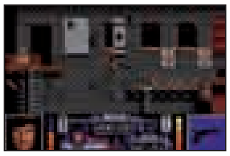
THE MAKING OF… ROBOCOP

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BATMAN: THE MOVIE
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, AMIGA, IBM PC AND COMPATIBLES
YEAR: 1989

NAVY SEALS (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, AMIGA, IBM PC AND COMPATIBLES
YEAR: 1990

TOTAL RECALL
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, AMIGA, IBM PC AND COMPATIBLES
YEAR: 1991



for a company executive. "The main driving force behind the game was Mike Lamb," he explains. "Although the most significant elements were taken from the coin-op version, it was Mike Lamb who translated and adapted it for home computers. I think the one thing that was my idea was the Photofit bit. For some reason, I was always into faces in games and I think my career in this business has left a small trail of breadcrumbs leading to what I am doing at the moment (Digimask). The Photofit section of *RoboCop* is one of those breadcrumbs. Other than that, I just generally managed the development and oversaw the game on all the formats. Data East did the NES version, and we did the Game Boy (in fact, Mike Lamb did it)."

While the resulting game would become memorable for many reasons, one of the most notable was the way in which it deviated from the norm of being a genre-specific game and incorporated the concept of several diverse sub-games that came together to form a complete experience. This would change the way software houses and players thought about videogames, and proved instrumental in Ocean's design process for many years to come. "I think we just wanted to make our mark," says Gary. "If we had simply converted the coin-op version then it wouldn't have been terribly satisfying (creatively) for the teams involved. We therefore wanted to put our own stamp and spin on the product, as well as differentiating it from the coin-op. Keep in mind the philosophy between the formats is very different: coin-ops want you to keep plugging quarters into the machine, whereas computer (video) games are able to be a little more diverse and challenging. We wanted to take advantage of that freedom and also incorporate ideas/scenes from the film, which were not just the blasting/action elements. This became a philosophical template for future movie licences."

With the game finally wrapped and ready for release, the whole team were understandably proud of their work, as Gary remembers, "The question I would always ask was 'Does the game stack up on its own merits?' If the answer was yes, then the addition of a high-profile movie licence would make it into an enormous success. I'll admit we didn't knock the ball out of the park game-wise



» Data East's arcade game in all its glory. Are you hard enough to actually complete it?



» Chainsaw fiends are a right bugger to kill and rob you of large amounts of health.



» Come on Robocop, it's only a van. Pump it full of lead and say something funny like "you'll be lorry you did that".

NICE SHOOTING, SON

The original 1988 Data East arcade game on which Ocean's release is partially based is an epic slice of Eighties coin-op action and a contender for the greatest side-scrolling shoot-'em-up of the decade. A legendary Attract mode, graphics that are remarkably reminiscent of the film, a slew of gritty effects and speech samples plus infuriatingly addictive gameplay perfectly encapsulate the relentless action of the explosive motion picture. With momentary respite coming only in the form of an occasional trip to the station for some FPS target practice, players must guide Robo through the criminal-infested streets of Old Detroit, from downtown to drug factories and everywhere in-between, ultimately leading to the final confrontation with Dick Jones at OCP's high-rise. Gary reveals his own thoughts on this classic release and its eventual conversion, "I thought the game was great, although a little too tough to translate directly to the home computer version. I think we made the conversion a tad easier. Also, there were some parts that were just unachievable when converting to an 8-bit computer (with measly memory). We thought we had taken the best bits and tagged on some of our own ideas. The mix was pretty good and the reviews and feedback reflected that."

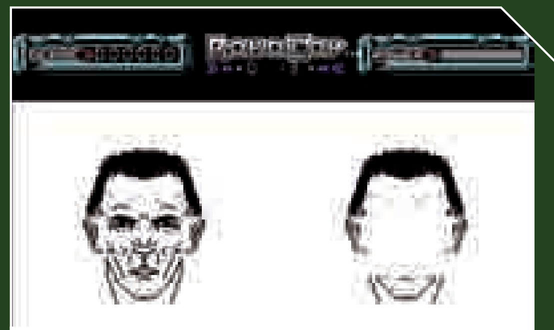
with every movie licence, but there were quite a few I am proud to have on my CV – *RoboCop*, *Batman*, *Platoon*, *The Untouchables*, *The Addams Family* are all ones that come immediately to mind."

But even Ocean itself had no comprehension of the titanic success that was to ensue. "I don't recall exact figures, but I remember we celebrated when hearing that over a million units (across all formats) had been sold," says Gary. "This was by far the biggest release Ocean had ever had at the time and there were a lot of smiling faces. An incredible achievement for a little northern English games company. I think that is the game that put us into the big leagues and gave us an entrée into the US (and ultimately Japan)."

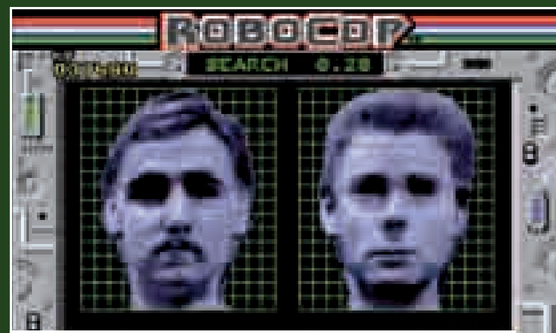
The staggered release of the more arcade-faithful 16-bit renditions in 1989, meanwhile, helped boost sales when the 1988 8-bit versions started to drop down the charts. Gary feels that this was a conscious decision, "We didn't have the same restrictions with the ST that we had with the Spectrum, obviously, and so we were able to convert a more faithful adaptation of the coin-op. As for the inclusion of the mini-games, well, they had become our own trademark and had been well received so it made sense to keep them intact."

By the close of the decade when Ocean found itself on the verge of another colossal release with *Batman: The Movie*, *RoboCop* had become the biggest home micro film licence success in history. This would have a knock-on effect on the company's future endeavours, leading to it translating many other movies including the *RoboCop* sequels. "Much like the movie sequels themselves, they were unable to repeat the same success," Gary says. "In fact, after *RoboCop 2*, I thought we could try to break some new ground and so asked Digital Image Design to create a second sequel. Note that this was not based on a movie at the time; it was 'our' *RoboCop 3*. It didn't work terribly well, as I think DID were out of their comfort zone creatively. But it was a genuine attempt to bring something new and innovative to a movie licence."

But it's the original that will remain the crown jewel in Ocean's legacy of achievements. Gary concludes, "There was a great spirit of collaboration on this project. Everyone involved contributed something of significance, without which it wouldn't have been the same… or as successful. Quite rightly, I think anyone who owned a piece of the *RoboCop* design/development has the right to feel proud. They were great days; great people and I believe that Ocean was the best place in the industry to work back then. The morale and atmosphere was fantastic and we all believed we were part of something special. Looking back, we probably were."



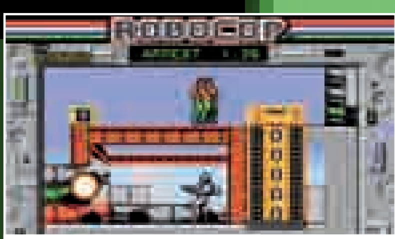
» Match the faces to score points. This is from the Spectrum version of the game.



» And here we have digitised photofits from the 16-bit version of Ocean's hit game.

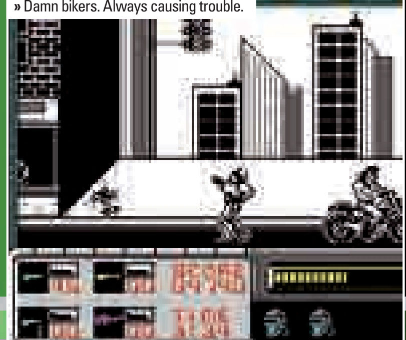


» The Amstrad version was brighter than its 8-bit peers but just as fun to play.



» Quite simply the best weapon in the game. It's short of ammo but causes huge amounts of damage to anything it touches.

"THEY WERE GREAT DAYS; GREAT PEOPLE AND I BELIEVE THAT OCEAN WAS THE BEST PLACE IN THE INDUSTRY TO WORK BACK THEN" GARY BRACEY



» Damn bikers. Always causing trouble.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION

GARY BRACEY ON

The game advertising the video and the video advertising the game: "This was a precedent we had started with *Platoon*. The movie companies soon got wise to the value of the 'real estate' on the video, but at the time it was incredible advertising for us."

The fact it was impossible to complete the drug factory level on the C64 without cheating: "Really? I honestly don't remember that. Oops."

That Ariston advert with the familiar music: "I did that deal myself, actually. The advertising agency rang up one day and said they wanted an electro-type 'hook' for a TV ad. One of their staff had been playing *RoboCop* on the Game Boy and thought it would be ideal. They offered us a few bob for it, so why not? Jon Dunn thought it was pretty cool! Oh, and it was actually the Game Boy version they used!"

Whatever happened to...

CHASE HQ II: SPECIAL

CHASE HQ WAS ONE OF THE CPC'S MOST CELEBRATED ARCADE CONVERSIONS, YET THE SEQUEL WAS CRUELLY CANNED BY OCEAN. OR WAS IT? MARTYN CARROLL GETS HIS DRIVING MITTS ON PERHAPS THE ONLY COPY OF THE GAME IN EXISTENCE



NEED TO KNOW

SYSTEMS:
CPC 464 PLUS, CPC 6128 PLUS, GX4000

DEVELOPER:
ICE SOFTWARE

START OF DEVELOPMENT:
1990

DATE OF CANCELLATION:
1991

VERSION PLAYED BY RG:
FINAL PRODUCT



» The box art follows the same style as other commercially released CPC cartridge games. It's completely kosher.

If you claim to own a complete, boxed copy of a game that was supposedly never released you're sure to attract some scepticism. Just ask James Bridges. He posted on the Web that *Chase HQ II* was part of his CPC cartridge collection, and despite uploading photos of the game in action; some people still screamed 'fake!' *Chase HQ II* is, after all, the most sought-after of all CPC cartridges – the one that even the most ardent Amstrad fan had given up hope of ever seeing. Could his claim be genuine?

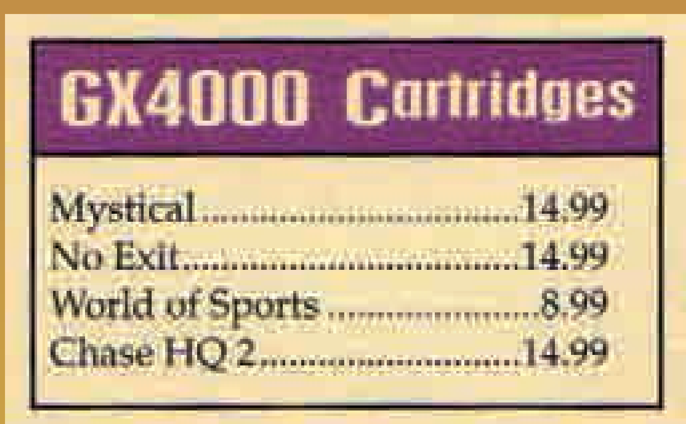
Retro Gamer contacted James and he kindly agreed to loan us the cartridge, and we're happy to report that it's the real deal. We've played the game through to completion – it's not a preview or a beta or anything like that – and it comes with a proper sleeve and instruction booklet. You're probably expecting to hear that James found the cart in a skip behind Ocean's Manchester offices, or acquired it from an ex-programmer in a secret deal involving hushed tones and brown envelopes, but the truth is rather more mundane. "I bought it from WAVE who used to advertise in *Amstrad Action*," he tells us. "It was towards the end of the magazine's life, so I'm not sure what sort of volume the advertisers were shifting. I'd speculate that WAVE had very few copies to sell. The box looked like it had been resealed – the red sticker that sealed the case was a different shade of red than normal."

We've dug out our copies of *Amstrad Action* and discovered that WAVE did, in fact, advertise *Chase HQ II* for sale several times in 1993. CPC fans will know that Ocean's other carts were released in 1990/91, so it's baffling to think how WAVE got hold of the game so much later (WAVE is long gone, incidentally – its number now dials through to a local taxi firm who thinks that CPC 464 is a UK postcode). So the questions of where the cart came from and whether it's genuine have been answered, but the bigger mystery is why a 100 per cent complete, highly anticipated game was denied a general release in the first place? Unfortunately, that question is not an easy one to answer.

The CPC and Spectrum versions of *Chase HQ* were handled in-house at Ocean, whereas the job to convert the sequel was farmed out to Ice Software. The lead programmer at Ice was Ian Morrison, who'd worked on a number of 8-bit arcade conversions in the past, including *Enduro Racer* for Activision and *Out Run* for US Gold. Sadly his recollection of developing *Chase HQ II* is a little sketchy. He worked on the game during the latter half of 1990 and had the Spectrum version ready to ship in December, but the CPC version missed its crucial Christmas release date. "I recall that the game was completed too late for a Christmas release as we focused on the Spectrum version first," Ian confirms. "I also think that projected market sales figures were not high enough to justify its release." But if the original game was such a huge hit, then why would Ocean doubt the success of the sequel?



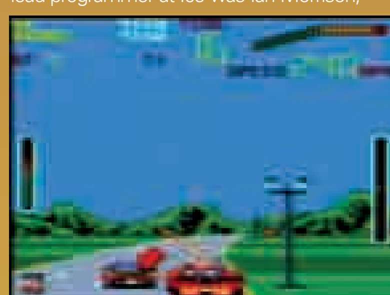
» *Chase HQ II* featured various locations, from the "bright lights of Paris to the rugged terrain of the Sahara" according to the advert.



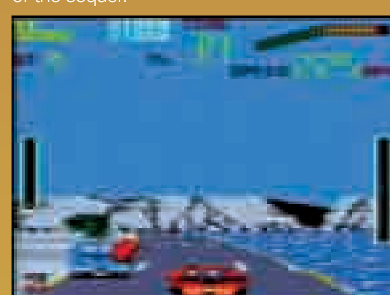
GX4000 Cartridges

Mystical	14.99
No Exit	14.99
World of Sports	8.99
Chase HQ 2	14.99

» Here's the proof. WAVE advertised *Chase HQ II* for sale in *Amstrad Action* between July and October 1993. We bet you wished you'd bagged a copy when you had the chance?



» The game looks nice, but besides the extra on-screen colours there's no reason why it wouldn't run on a standard CPC.



» Your mission was to track down, chase and apprehend all of the game's dangerous criminals.

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION



» *Chase HQ II* was reviewed in the May 1991 issue of French mag *Amstrad Cent Pour Cent*, and from the look of the screenshots the reviewer had been playing on the finished version.

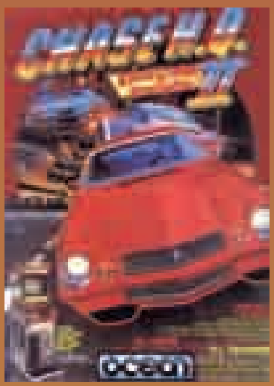
The problem was partly of its own making. Ocean had backed Amstrad's new GX4000 console and CPC Plus computers, all of which included updated hardware and support for cartridge games. Ocean was interested in cartridges over tapes and disks for two reasons – they were more expensive (initially retailing at between £25 and £30), so the margins were greater, and they were virtually impossible to pirate. Unfortunately, Amstrad had difficulty duplicating cartridges and the release dates started to slide. *Robocop 2*, *Navy Seals*, *Pang* and *Plotting* received belated releases throughout 1991, and by the time they did appear, the Plus-enabled Amstrad machines were being sold off cheaply to clear the shelves (see **Retro Gamer** issue 11 for the unfortunate tale of the Amstrad GX4000). To make matters worse, all four games were only available on cartridge, so the many CPC owners were left begging. But hang on: if Ocean thought there was a market for *Plotting* – a rather low-key puzzle game – then why would it get jittery about a high-profile release like *Chase HQ II*? We'd speculate it's because the game just wasn't very good.

Like far too many CPC games, *Chase HQ II* was developed with the Spectrum in mind and then ported across with very little or no effort. In fact, save for its colourful graphics, which do at least make use of the Plus's expanded colour palette, the game is identical to the Spectrum version in look, feel and execution. This, of course, wouldn't be a problem if the Spectrum version had been a top-draw conversion rather than a distinctly average racer that was left choking on the exhaust fumes of the excellent original. The CPC version of *Chase HQ II* also had to contend with Ocean's own *Burnin' Rubber*, the very good racing game that came bundled with all new Amstrad machines. Perhaps Ocean figured that people wouldn't pay for a game that wasn't as good as one that they already owned?

We'll probably never find out the real reason why *Chase HQ II* for the Amstrad CPC was shelved, or how a mail order company managed to get its hands on it. Nor does it really matter that the game is a lukewarm Spectrum port with a splash of colour. All that matters is that a complete, fully working copy of the game does actually exist. And surely there has to be more copies floating around out there somewhere? The chase to find them is on.

"CHASE HQ II IS THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER OF ALL CPC CARTRIDGES – THE ONE THAT EVEN THE MOST ARDENT AMSTRAD FAN HAD GIVEN UP HOPE OF EVER SEEING"





» **Above:** This handy chopper drops a rocket launcher that you can use to blow the doors off the enemy vehicles. **Right:** An advert for the game showing just what CPC owners were missing.



» The game's lead programmer, Ian Morrison, also worked on *Out Run*, a game that *Chase HQ II* certainly shares some similarities with.



» A collision with a cross-town bus sees you spinning to an awkward stop. Time to hit the turbo, Mr Driver.

CART OFF

Proof that *Chase HQ II* exists raises hopes that other 'lost' CPC cartridges may one day be found. Most wanted for many would be the enhanced versions of *Double Dragon* and *Shadow Warriors*. Both of these brawlers were advertised by mail order company Kompart UK in the April 1992 issue of *Amstrad Action*. The same advert also listed *Chase HQ* – did Kompart have the original game on cart, or did it mean to list the sequel? The following issue of *Amstrad Action* actually included *Chase HQ* in its cartridge round-up, although it admitted it hadn't seen the game in action. One cartridge game that *AA* definitely played was *Gazza II*, which it reviewed in its May 1992 issue, calling it "arguably the best footy game ever seen on the Amstrad." The game was also reviewed in *Amstrad Cent Pour Cent*, suggesting that finished copies were given to the press.



THE MAKING OF...

CALIFORNIA GAMES

Hey, dudes! Don your shades and get ready to get totally tubular, gnarly and rad (whatever that means), because it's time for sports – California-style! Grab some embarrassing Eighties clothes, tip sand down your shorts, and read on, as Craig Grannell talks to Chuck Sommerville and Kevin 'Fuzzy' Furry about their work on Epyx's landmark sports title



***Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*? *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX*? Pah! We had extreme sports on 8-bit machines, a decade before those newfangled titles were a glimmer in the digital milkman's eye.** Courtesy of Epyx, *California Games* enabled you to cut your teeth on the half-pipe, carry out death-defying stunts on a BMX, perform crazy manoeuvres on a surfboard, roller-skate along a dangerous boardwalk, and, er, kick a foot bag and fling a flying disc about – all from the relative safety of your armchair. Okay, so kicking a small bean bag and throwing a plastic disc isn't exactly extreme, but four out of six isn't bad, and, unlike most sports games of the day, the success ratio in *California Games* was higher: all six events were engrossing and fun.

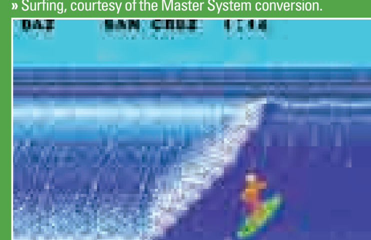
Although Epyx was renowned for its sports titles by the time *California Games* arrived, the game was still a departure. Previous titles were largely traditional fare, covering Olympic-type events, and although *World Games* took things further, adding scope with 'world' events, *California Games* was more focused and – certainly for the time – unique. "Extreme sports were starting to emerge, and I believe it was Matthew Householder who had the idea of packaging them together to make 'yet another *Games* game'," remembers Chuck Sommerville, one of the programmers for *California Games*. "The great part for us was in being released from doing traditional sports – it gave us a lot of latitude."

For Kevin 'Fuzzy' Furry – another of the game's programmers – this extra freedom was bliss, "In the Eighties, games designers were like authors, and we pretty much defined what we did and how we did it – the management was dependent on our success." However, by the mid-Eighties, marketing was creeping into the mix. Fuzzy recalls *California Games* being the first *Games* series title that had plenty of marketing clout behind it, including giveaways and competitions; and so while originality was at the fore as far as punters were concerned, there was strong financial reasoning to concentrate on a different area of sports, and a rather more cynical effort to relieve gamers of their cash by tapping into a new trend.

Chuck also divulges that working on the *Games* series wasn't as glamorous as it might seem, "It could feel like a production line: the *Games* series followed a predictable set of problems – they were all mini-games tied together with a central menu system; individual games were isolated from the rest of the product, so they could be handled with a simple data structure passed back and forth." He does admit that some creativity was given to the programmer to design events, but reckons the events themselves were chosen by committee, "For *California Games*, there was a brainstorming session with key project members. We looked at what could be done with existing hardware, what could be interesting, and what would be fun – fun was always a big part of the decision." Fuzzy adds, "Some games were also chosen to tie into the competitions, and some for girls."

With events decided on, the workload was divided among the team. "Each event was designed primarily by the programmer responsible for it," remembers Chuck. Kevin recalls the

» Surfing, courtesy of the Master System conversion.



» Faff about too long in the flying-disc event and your partner is grabbed by a UFO.



» In the BMX event, the rider does his best to replicate a scene from Spielberg's *ET.*





design being like an art for him, "You'd spend time thinking about the hardware and game concept, and as the idea grew, you eliminated things you felt could not be done." When we ask if he felt limited by the Commodore 64, he reminds us it was, at the time, a powerful device, "It had lots of colour, sound and 64KB of memory – that was heaven!"

Some aspects of *California Games* made a break from earlier efforts. The streamlined 'running man' from *Summer Games* and *Impossible Mission* gave way to larger sprites, which had more character than even those in *World Games*. "The artwork was done by in-house guys that specialised in getting the most out of the least pixels," recalls Chuck. "We'd ask – in general – for what we wanted, in terms of positions and animation frames, and then it was a case of 'give and take' negotiation!" Fuzzy also remembers the "cool tools and great art department" fondly, but notes some racy and gory elements didn't make the final cut. "Sex and violence," he laughs. "As nerds, we'd created versions with naked girls, and there was one where the roller skater left blood when she fell – the goal was to finish without scars!" Kevin also recalls a version of the flying-disc event that had bombs instead of the disc. "We spent far more time than usual on *California Games*. Since marketing was spending so much money on it, we were allowed to go crazy!"

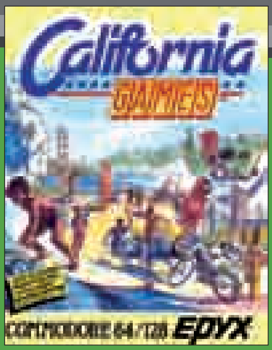
Something that didn't change from previous Epyx games was a penchant for immediacy and the creation of fluid control methods, in stark contrast to joystick wagglers such as Activision's *Decathlon*. "Everything had to be easy to figure out, with no dead ends, and you couldn't do anything that wasn't fair. We didn't have random failures, and there was lots and lots of testing with actual players," explains Fuzzy. For the controls, it was important things felt right. Rather than battering a joystick to death, timing and rhythm were key, as Chuck explains, "With the rowing event in *Summer Games II*, I wanted something that needed speed, but wasn't a joystick-buster, and so I made controls that required a rhythm you could speed up. If you didn't sync to the animation, you'd flail. In the *California Games* half-pipe event, the controls are again basically a rhythm control, tracking the player's motion, but with added button presses and directions for tricks. I thought it was pretty simple." Intuitive, simple control methods prevail elsewhere, too: rhythmic 'rolls' around the right-hand semicircle of the joystick's extremities simulate the feet of the roller skater, and precision is key in the foot-bag, surfing and flying-disc events.

However, in the BMX event, some old-school freneticism reared its head, the bike's speed being maintained via regular, frantic pushes of the joystick

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** EPYX
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **GENRE:** SPORTS
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



CONVERSION CAPERS



Unsurprisingly, given the success of previous *Games* series titles, *California Games* wasn't restricted to Commodore's beige box. Fairly direct conversions were made for the likes of the Speccy and Amiga, along with several consoles (the Mega Drive version perhaps being the best, with great graphics, but easier gameplay). More radical updates were crafted for the Atari Lynx and Atari 2600, both of which offered utterly treacherous BMX courses.

Opinion remains divided regarding whether the conversions retained the essence that made the C64 version so great. "I saw most of the conversions, since I stayed with Epyx through the company's decline," says Chuck, adding that he thought the PC version was pretty good. Fuzzy is less convinced about many of the conversions, "Some of them are only using the concept, and on consoles that don't have a joystick, you lose the interface we created, where it felt like you were actually playing the sports."

THE MAKING OF… CALIFORNIA GAMES

» Look away now, animal lovers – the seagull gets walloped, amusingly earning the player 1,000 points.



» Sensing the fact he'd never make the big time, the skateboarder decided to take it easy on the half-pipe.



to the right (fire being used to jump, at which point directions can be used to perform tricks). "Occasionally, we took pride in breaking joysticks – working up a sweat can give a game a real sports feel," admits Fuzzy. "But everything we did was an attempt to bring the player into the game with a realistic control method – to detect motions and speed, requiring the gamer to use the interface correctly with skill. Chuck and I would constantly try each other's interfaces, and I remember Chuck once completely dismissed his design because we agreed it just didn't feel right."

On the Commodore 64, *California Games* shone. A *Zzap!64* Gold Medal ("Epyx surpass themselves yet again with another incredible sports simulation") and *Commodore User* Screen-Star ("Many software houses aim to reach perfection; Epyx are far and away the closest") cemented Epyx's place among the elite, and ensured the top of the charts again beckoned. "From the day we started *California Games*, I knew it would be a hit," claims Fuzzy. Chuck admits he guessed otherwise, "Fuzzy always points out how I thought it would be a total flop – it gives him that 'I told you so' ammunition."

Success was more limited on other platforms, due to the variable quality of the conversions (see the 'Conversion Capers' boxout on page 69), but even on the Commodore 64, Epyx soon began to fade. "We suffered from the same problems as any successful company – once you think you have a secret method to make a hit game, someone thinks you can just hire more nerds and have more success," says Fuzzy, adding that Epyx was also hard at work on, what became, the Atari Lynx at the time. "That took some of our top engineers away from games, but by the time Epyx realised its mistake, it was out of business."

And prior to the big bang, Epyx sports games made a return to traditional sports, lacking the imagination and excitement of *California Games*.

"*California Games* was the peak," explains Chuck. "*The Games: Summer Edition* had some better graphics – especially the velodrome event – but, in general, I think the genre had been played out." However, a last-ditch attempt was made by Epyx to return to its glory days, with *California Games II*, although the end result found few fans. "I put a crew together to do it as a skunkworks project, but by this time Epyx was pretty much dead," says Fuzzy, admitting that the game was largely down to "a simple meeting of minds with beer, where we allowed our cute artist girl to choose the events." Kevin also recalls a 'missing' *Games* series title, based around 'thrill sports', "We had the idea 15 years before everyone else, but marketing

> "IN THE EIGHTIES, GAMES DESIGNERS WERE LIKE AUTHORS, AND WE PRETTY MUCH DEFINED WHAT WE DID AND HOW WE DID IT – THE MANAGEMENT WAS DEPENDANT ON OUR SUCCESS" KEVIN 'FUZZY' FURRY

» If the forthcoming *California Games* remake isn't as pretty as this Mega Drive version, we shall get very angry indeed.

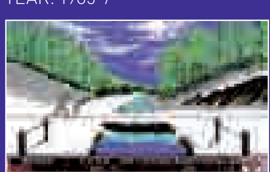


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

JUMPMAN
SYSTEM: APPLE II, ATARI 800/XL/XE, COMMODORE 64, IBM PC
YEAR: 1983-4

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI 7800, BBC MICRO, COMMODORE 64, ELECTRON, NINTENDO DS, PS2, PSP, SEGA MASTER SYSTEM, WII, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984-2007

WINTER GAMES (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, APPLE MAC, ATARI 2600, ATARI ST, COMMODORE 64, IBM PC, NES, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985-7





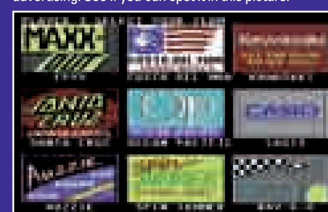
» The seagull looked on, clearly impressed at the girl's ability to levitate.



» We were going to add a witty joke here about 'Surfing USA', but, you know, life's too short.



» *California Games* sports extremely subtle brand advertising. See if you can spot it in this picture.



shot our idea down as stupid. It would have included cliff diving, a 'Velcro man' jumping on to a building and sticking, parachuting, bungee jumping, parasurfing, and so on…"

respected each other's work, but it was a game to be the best. We didn't do our work for a living – we lived our work." He talks of today's designers hamstrung by committees, marketing dictating

creators if they're surprised a new version of their game is due to hit current consoles. "To be honest, I'm always surprised games live longer than ten years – I'd never expect an action game to outlive the platform it was written for," admits Chuck. However, Fuzzy thinks otherwise, "*California Games* has strong legs and will run forever – the concept and dynamic is timeless. The key – as with any good game – is it kept things simple. If you can't pick up a joystick and have fun, it's not a good game."

However, it's safe to say neither Chuck nor Fuzzy will be contributing to

"CHUCK AND I WOULD CONSTANTLY TRY EACH OTHER'S INTERFACES, AND I REMEMBER CHUCK ONCE COMPLETELY DISMISSED HIS DESIGN BECAUSE WE AGREED IT JUST DIDN'T FEEL RIGHT" KEVIN 'FUZZY' FURRY

Despite Epyx's demise and the odd missed opportunity, Fuzzy remains proud of his work, and of the original *California Games*. "We were artists, kids that could write software and design games, and since we were few, we taught each other," he says. "We

what needs doing. "They're targeting the average, but at Epyx, we went for the home run, because by aiming high, you'll at least get to first base."

Such dedication and enthusiasm perhaps explains why *California Games* stands the test of time. We ask the

any updated versions themselves, due to being busy with their LED lighting company, Lighting Science Group (www.ledholdings.com). "In the Eighties, we programmed various LED gizmos, which changed colour for lighting effects and displayed messaging – how did we know 20 years ago that LED would become Edison light bulbs for the future?" laughs Fuzzy. But does he ever get wistful for the old days and tempted to return to his gaming roots? "Always! And some day, when I have time, I'll write more games. Until then, I'm a frustrated games designer who needs to run a Fortune 500 company."

» Seven? SEVEN?! Still, at least we haven't got a stupid moustache. Grumble grumble.

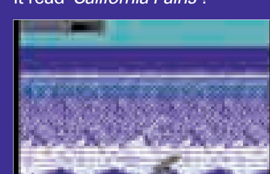


» Sadly, the CPC version isn't as good as we thought it was.



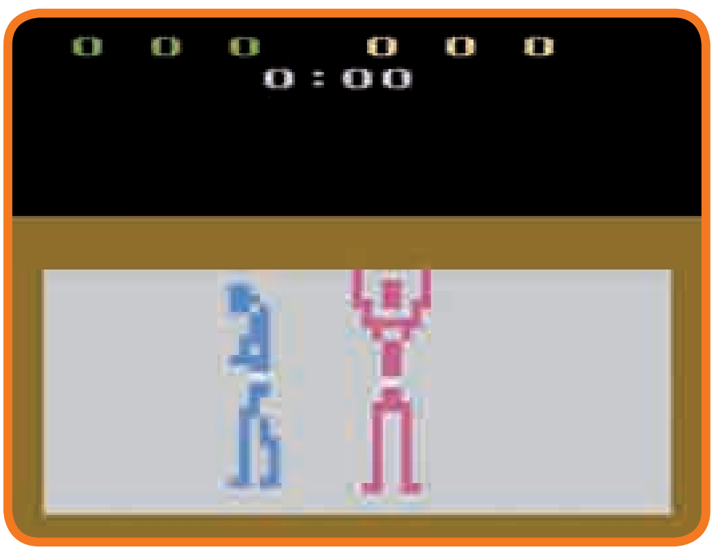
EASTER EGGS

By the time *World Games* rolled around, it was clear Epyx wasn't content with entirely straight-laced digital sporting events. Joining the increasingly extreme sports on offer was a raft of 'hidden' animations (such as the Scot in the caber toss getting hammered into the ground after making a mistake), and these continued in *California Games*. Shake the half-pipe enough and the Hollywood sign falls down; hang around in the flying disc event and your partner is abducted by aliens; and in surfing, a group of creatures are on-hand to ridicule you when you screw up. "These were us having fun and lightening the mood," says Chuck. "And they were a last-minute reward when you completed a game – the gamer's way to party," says Fuzzy, adding, "In the C64 version, if you pull the disk out of the drive after the first seek of the drive head, then flip the disk, you get a title-screen Easter egg: instead of *California Games*, it read '*California Pains*'!"



THE ARCS OF ATARI

The Atari logo: an upside down peeled banana or an alphabetic representation of a game of Pong? Designed by George Opperman in the Seventies, the Atari motif would become as well loved with mini adults as the McDonald's arches and the abrasive capital M used for the advent of music television. The wood-grain Atari 2600 would go on to sell over 30 million units and more than 100 million game cartridges in its lifetime. Retro Gamer tracks down some of the men that formed the very arc of Atari gaming in a feature that we've cleverly entitled The Arcs of Atari (scoff!)



» *Karate* was arguably one of the most amusing games on the Atari 2600. We're not quite sure what the blue man is doing hunched over in that manner though.

What are your fondest memories of the days when the Atari 2600 ruled all?

Steve Wright: The CES shows. Atari had a huge booth at the CES show and I was always asked to do 'booth duty'. People and the press would come by and get all excited about the new games. I would demonstrate the games and reveal stories about game development.

Owen Rubin: Well, those of us in the coin-op side, where many of the original game ideas for the 2600 came from, found it aggravating at best that our ideas were used to make 2600 products. We were never credited for the creation, or allowed to partake of the very large bonus pools 2600 designers made on porting our games.

David Crane: Programming for the 2600 was one of the toughest technical challenges ever in the history of consumer electronics, so that should make it an unpleasant memory, right? I have always loved a good puzzle, and you can say the same thing about a puzzle: "Why involve yourself in an endeavour where the solution is hidden and hard to find?" The answer is, "Because it is fun!"

Warren Robinett: It was pretty satisfying to get the idea for doing an adventure game – rooms, objects, and monsters – which existed only as a text adventure game at that time, as a videogame, and then figure out how to do it. Many late nights and long hours – and then – in spite of significant obstacles and nay-sayers have it turn into a big success.

What has been your greatest ever Atari 2600 triumph and why?

Steve Wright: The rapid prototyping game development system. I noticed



that it would take anywhere from nine to twelve months to program a new 2600 game, then it would be tested and often found not to be any good and shelved. I proposed that we develop a system that would allow us to get a game up and running in a few weeks. Then we could test it, and if it was found to be good, release it for programming. In about nine months the system was up and running – a Symbolics 3600 computer with a high bandwidth connection to an Ikonas frame buffer. The Ikonas had very fast graphics processing power which simulated the graphics chip in the 2600. The Symbolics computer used Lisp, an object-oriented programming language that was ideal for writing the game logic. Together, they formed a $200,000 one ton Atari 2600. We actually used the system to create the videogame animation for the movie *Superman III* in addition to some game designs.

Owen Rubin: Getting Ray Kassar to realise that game designers were not 'ribbon clerks.' He truly believed that any idiot could program the device, and that he could sell any crap made for it. So I created a 'game' that was simply a colourful dot on the screen that the joystick could move around and change. I left it on his desk with a note that said something to the effect of, this was 'anything' now let me see him sell it!

David Crane: The 'Dragster display' was possibly the most advanced piece of display code written for the 2600. To begin with, the 2600 was designed to display at most 16 pixels of high-resolution graphics on one TV scan line. Building on other people's work, I developed the first 48-bit display (which would come to be used in almost every game, in the form of the 'six-digit score display'). With the Dragster display, that 48-bit display moved across the screen, you had to be there to understand how much additional effort and out-of-the-box thinking that required, but the program timing to achieve that effect made it arguably the tightest piece of code ever written for the 2600.

Warren Robinett: Please let it be inventing the action-adventure game, not inventing the Easter egg.

What's your favourite Atari 2600 game and why?

Steve Wright: That's a tough one. I think it has to be *Missile Command*. It has superb gameplay, and uses the Atari joystick – my favourite controller.

Owen Rubin: Strangely, I loved the early games like *Air Fight* and *Tank* because I was there when they were created. We were all amazed at what the chip could do. So while not the best games, to be there at their completion was very cool.

David Crane: I might be expected to say *Pitfall!* but my favourite is *Grand Prix*. This was a game that required a high level of technical achievement to make the cars so colourful (and to make their tyres spin with the surface of the road). There were no angle animations or changes to the car graphics in the game, but each car required 39 separate frames of graphics. On the 2600, objects 'wrap' around the screen horizontally, such that pixels that extend off the right edge of the screen will be seen on the left. I couldn't allow this to happen, and went to great lengths to eliminate it. But after

"I PROPOSED THAT WE DEVELOP A SYSTEM THAT WOULD ALLOW US TO GET A GAME UP AND RUNNING IN A FEW WEEKS" STEVE WRIGHT ON HIS GREATEST ATARI 2600 TRIUMPH

LOADING CART (I)...

THE GAMES THAT MADE THE LEGENDS FAMOUS...



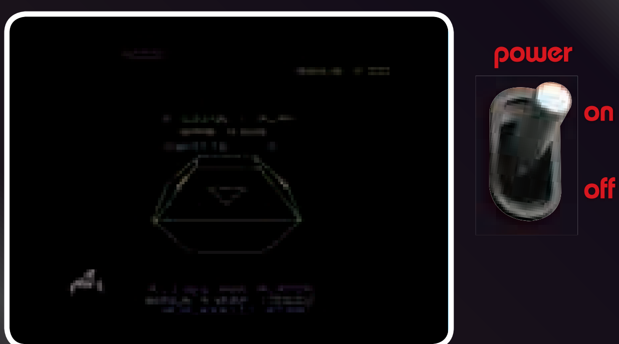


CHAMPIONSHIP SOCCER AKA PELE SOCCER STEVE WRIGHT
We couldn't really place the mock-up *Superman* game in this boxout, so instead, being the football-loving bunch we are, it's Steve's superlative soccer game that finds itself in the floodlights. Despite its rudimentary look and the fact that Steve had never even seen, let alone played a game of football, the essence of the beautiful game still remained intact. It was technically turf-breaking for its day thanks to its fluid scrolling and brilliant three-man attacking formation, which allowed the players to regimentally march up the pitch. Coincidentally, this game is reputed to be where Coach Bombay found inspiration for the Mighty V, therefore allowing the Mighty Ducks to win the Peewee Hockey final in 1992. It's also a gazillion times better than the God-awful *Pele* game that was later released on the Mega Drive. Also, in Atari's game, when the players kick the ball up the pitch it looks like they're giving you the highway salute.

THE ARCS OF ATARI

"I NEVER PLAY VIDEOGAMES; MAKING THEM IS FAR MORE INTERESTING" WARREN ROBINETT REVEALS WHY HE DOESN'T PLAY VIDEOGAMES

LOADING CART (2)...
THE GAMES THAT MADE THE LEGENDS FAMOUS...



MAJOR HAVOC AKA TOLIAN'S WEB OWEN RUBIN
Rubin's 'visioneering' swan song at Atari – before he left the company and joined Bally Sente – is one of the finest Vector arcade games to ever be released. A fertile collaboration between Owen and a headstrong young Atari freshman by the name of Mark Cerny (who would later go on to work on the *Sonic the Hedgehog* games) this interstellar space blaster is packed to the rafters with lucid visuals, a pioneering back story and even finds time to flit seamlessly from a first-person space shmup to a third-person platformer. Not enough? Oh, it even included a neat little mini-game of *Breakout* that you could play while you waited for its maps to load… That's a good 11 years before Namco had the idea of featuring *Galaxian* at the beginning of its excellent *Ridge Racer*. It just goes to show that Rubin was really ahead of his time.

all of the technical achievements, it was also a fun game. *Grand Prix* epitomised the high-speed action of the best Atari 2600 games.

Warren Robinett: I never play videogames; making them is far more interesting. But I haven't done that in a long time either. Why? Well, long story… I got into educational games, started a company that nearly killed me… got a job as a VR researcher, which ate up a lotta years… university politics (what a God-awful waste of time)… then got married… had kids… got divorced… before getting a serious nerd job in nano-electronics at HP Labs… and, uh, here we are today.

What did the Atari 2600 contribute to the gaming world?

Steve Wright: It introduced the concept of a programmable game cartridge. All previous home systems were 'dedicated' – they only played one or two games. This was the first one that allowed you to play a whole new game by buying a new cartridge. It set the marketing model for all subsequent videogame systems to this day.

Owen Rubin: It started the home game console revolution. Yes, I know they say the Odyssey was the first console, but it was not very good, and did not have a lot of games. The Atari 2600 set the standard for the first cartridge programmable game unit for the home. And in its day, it was very cool.

David Crane: The 2600 did nothing less than to give birth to the third-party videogame publishing business. This was not Atari's intention – everybody knows you make more money selling razor blades than razors – but that was the 2600's primary contribution to electronic gaming. Every company that makes videogame software is in the business because of the 2600.

Warren Robinett: I liked the one man/one game nature of game design back then. The way games are made now, with teams of dozens of people, constrains some of the wilder impulses individuals have, unfortunately.

What was the most frustrating element of working with the Atari 2600

Steve Wright: The incredibly limited graphics resources in the console and the small cartridges. A game cartridge was written in 6502 Assembly language and the code had to be incredibly 'tight' to fit all the gameplay and graphics into 2K or 4K of software. The 2600 graphics chip was incredibly primitive, so a great deal of cleverness had to be used to outsmart the limitations of the chip and create videogames with interesting

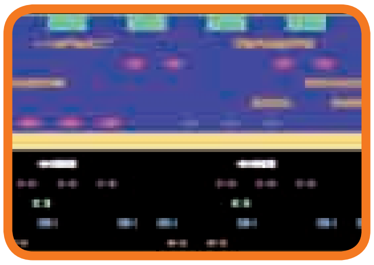


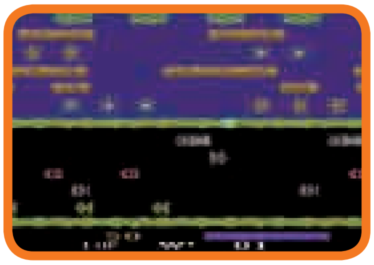
» Love it or loathe it, *ET*'s opening screen still looks pretty impressive.

"THE 2600 DID NOTHING LESS THAN GIVE BIRTH TO THE THIRD-PARTY VIDEOGAME PUBLISHING BUSINESS"
DAVID CRANE ON THE ATARI 2600'S CONTRIBUTION TO VIDEOGAMING

graphics. The fact that the chip was so primitive allowed the game programmer to outsmart it, so it was a hidden, if not infuriating, virtue. Programming in Assembly language is arduous, and a great deal of game development time had to be spent optimising the code, which is why the game development took nine to twelve months.

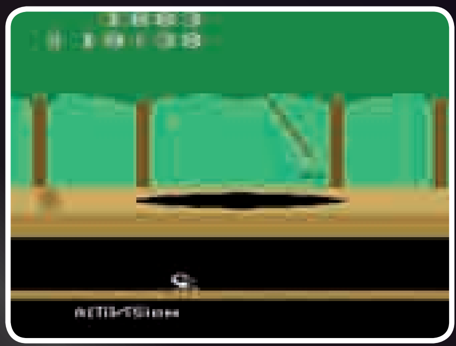
Owen Rubin: Getting it to display anything more than a few missile and player graphics on a simple background was like pulling teeth. You literally had to count CPU cycles and control the drawing of the beam on the television screen to do more complex stuff. You literally had to count CPU cycles and control the drawing of the beam on the TV screen to do more complex stuff. That means that 90 per cent of your program, the part running while the display was active, was spending all its time drawing stuff. During the very short time when the television beam was returning to the other side (horizontal retrace) and when it went from the bottom back to the top (vertical retrace) was all you had to actually do gameplay computing. It was why some hard games like chess would blank the screen with colours when it was 'thinking' so it could use all the processing available. And remember, this was an 8-bit simple 6502 processor running at (I believe) less than 1 MHz (not 1 GHz) but rather in the 750 KHz range. Today's systems have 3 to 4 GHz, 32 and 64-bit processors, running with sleek graphics units and math units. We had none of that!





» Here you can see the differences between the Parker's and the Starpath versions of *Frogger*. Both are excellent though.

LOADING CART (3)...
THE GAMES THAT MADE THE LEGENDS FAMOUS...





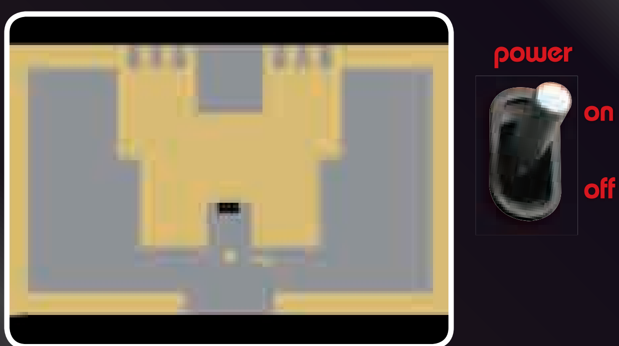
PITFALL DAVID CRANE

"As a technical achievement, *Pitfall!* was good but not great. As a platform game, *Pitfall!* was good but not great." David Crane's words not ours we'd like to add. There's no arguing with the level of impact that 'little running man' Crane pencilled in between games while at Activision would come to bear on the industry, let alone the platform genre specifically. In 1,000 hours he eked powers from the humble 2600 that many thought weren't possible. His iconic protagonist Harry can be seen as the first 'human'-looking character to ever appear in a videogame, the game's smooth animation and pace never wane for a second and then there's the sheer enormity of the game (254 screens), all astonishingly crammed into 4K. It remains the most well known of the 68 videogames Crane designed and programmed in his 30 year career.

THE ARCS OF ATARI

"I LIKED THE LIMITED MEMORY, LIMITED PROCESSING POWER, AND LIMITED GRAPHICS. EVERY WORD (OR BIT) HAD TO CARRY ITS WEIGHT" WARREN ROBINETT ON WHY HE WASN'T FRUSTRATED BY THE ATARI 2600

LOADING CART (4)...
THE GAMES THAT MADE THE LEGENDS FAMOUS...



ADVENTURE WARREN ROBINETT
After cutting his teeth on his first Atari 2600 game (a simple maze racer called *Slot Racer*), Warren Robinett, directly inspired by the 'original' text adventure game authored by Don Woods and Willie Crowther, got working on his own adventure game. Facing stiff pessimism from his blinkered boss, who convinced him that the game would be impossible to make, Warren set about working on a prototype of the game, which he managed to knock out in a month. The finished game took him a year to finish and Warren would develop the entire game on his own. "I was the sole designer, artist, sound designer and tester for *Adventure*. It may be hard to believe nowadays, but that's the way things used to be back then," explains Warren. Adventure may well have looked crude, but it was the actual gameplay that was important, and in that respect Robinett had struck gold. A superb adventure that remains an utter joy to play.

David Crane: The puzzle that was the Atari 2600 could drive you to the brink. You would often spend 50 hours writing and rewriting 100 lines of code, only to find you have to start completely over. Another frustrating problem was the 'page boundary'. When you insert program steps into the code, as is very common, all of the code below the insert point moves into later memory addresses. The execution time of code on the 6502 microprocessor changes, based on where it is in memory, so sometimes, after 100 hours of tweaking the timing of a section of code, the code moves by a couple of address locations and your display goes completely bonkers. (This is easy to fix, but drives you crazy nonetheless.)

Warren Robinett: I liked the limited memory, limited processing power, and limited graphics. It was like writing a sonnet. Every word (or bit) had to carry its weight.

And the most rewarding?

Steve Wright: Working with Children's Television Workshop. I was managing the development of five CTW titles so I needed to travel to NY several times to meet with the CTW staff to collaborate on the game design. Most of our game designs targeted teenagers, so it was nice to be able to work on something for the little ones.

Owen Rubin: When something actually worked. I recall when the person working on displaying some text characters on the screen got that working, it was very cool. Seeing *Pac-Mac*, as bad a game as it was, display all those objects. Any time anything 'impossible' happened it was very rewarding.

David Crane: The same things that frustrate the programmer are also the most rewarding. You never quit until you find a solution, and the harder a problem is to fix, the more rewarding it is when you solve it.

Warren Robinett: Getting my work published worldwide at age 26.

Why do you think the Atari 2600 remains so popular with gamers?

Steve Wright: With clever programming, it had remarkable graphics and gaming capability for such a simple unit. As the first videogaming 'superstar' system it attracted a lot of talented people that wrote wonderful games. Because the graphics chip was designed to be software controlled (as a cost-saving measure, not due to any profound insight) it accidentally allowed the programmer to be inventive at improving the graphics.

Owen Rubin: It seems like all retro gaming has become very popular again. I think some of that has to do with the nature of the games. These were typically decent games. Since we had little graphics 'wow factor', the gameplay had to be compelling to be fun, and a lot more effort went into gameplay than the graphics.

David Crane: There is a lot of nostalgia surrounding the Atari 2600. For many gamers it was their first game system, and it harks back to the time when they had no responsibilities (other than to figure out how to get to the next level). In today's 3D games, many designers are content with 15 frames per second of action; some will accept even 10fps or less. On a 2600 game, the action

runs at 60fps, and the player can feel the difference. The action is fast, the controls immediately responsive and the gamer is in complete control. There aren't a lot of modern games that can make the same claims.

Warren Robinett: I'd just be guessing.

What was it like working at Atari?

Steve Wright: I was there for six years, from the first year that the Atari 2600 was manufactured until 'black Monday' when the videogame industry took its first (of many) downturns. It was like working for a movie studio. Atari was rich, famous, and sought-after during that time. There were lavish company get aways, dinners, trade shows, trips to NY and Chicago, and I even rode in the Warner corporate jet a couple of times (Warner owned Atari).

Owen Rubin: It was a *lot* of really hard work, but also a lot of fun. I worked on the arcade game side of the company, and when an arcade game went into an actual arcade to be played, it was incredibly rewarding to see people actually playing the game and having fun. But it was not all 'fun' at work. We worked *very* long hours (many 24 to 60+ hour straight shifts) to get games completed on time. We saw a lot of our work just thrown away, and that was always difficult. But we were treated fairly well and had a lot of fun at the same time.

David Crane: I joined Atari after the really loose days. There were no lobby hot-tub parties, nor were there clouds of drug-laden smoke floating about in the design lab. (That is a good thing. I would not have fit in… I don't even allow alcohol to kill my brain cells). Atari has a reputation for being laid back but in reality, the work ethic was strong and very professional. Atari might have been in the right place

"IT WAS A LOT OF REALLY HARD WORK, BUT ALSO A LOT OF FUN. WE WORKED VERY LONG HOURS TO GET GAMES COMPLETED ON TIME" OWEN RUBIN ON WORKING AT ATARI

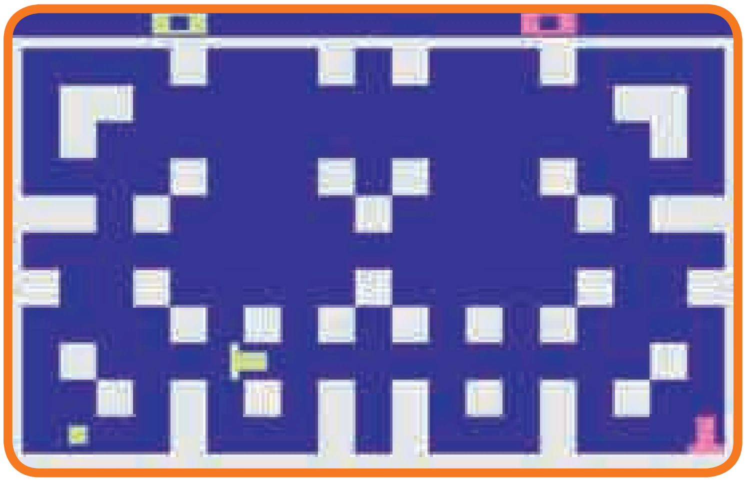
at the right time with a great idea but there was no luck involved. The success of the early Atari came from hard work and dedication.

Warren Robinett: It was open-ended, chaotic, not a place for people who need to know the rules.

How important was Atari's impact on the industry?

Steve Wright: Most profound. It not only introduced the key concept of the programmable videogame but also set a high standard for gameplay excellence. It was great for the 'twitch' videogames – those quick-reflex shoot-'em-up type of games that make up the core of videogaming today. Atari's coin-op (arcade) division developed some of the most popular videogames and then we in the home game division would do our best to implement them on the Atari 2600. Atari would also buy the rights to other popular coin-op games for the home game division.

Owen Rubin: In my early days at Atari in 1976, it *was* the industry. It laid down the rules and the industry grew



» *Slot Racers* was the first game that Warren Robinett worked on before tackling *Adventure.*



» Sega's *Up 'N Down*: a very early precursor to the sublime *Sega Rally.*

THE ARCS OF ATARI

WE AM LEGEND

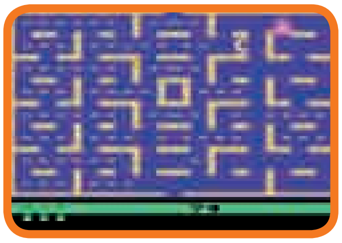
AN ATARI BIO SO BRIEF THEY WOULD ALL COMFORTABLY FIT ON A 4K CART

STEVE WRIGHT
After graduating from San Jose State, Steve got caught up in the Vietnam War before landing a job at IBM as a technician. He then took a job for a company that bought IBM electronic typewriters before Atari approached him to oversee the quality of the graphics chips that were going into its VCS. He then moved into games development in 1979, made a cracking footy game, a special effect for *Superman III* and now works freelance in digital effects.

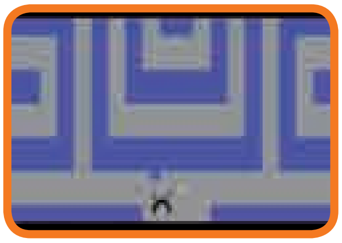
OWEN RUBIN
A mustachioed Owen graduated from the University of California at Berkeley before moving to San Jose. His first job was as a software engineer for Atari and his first project was to fire someone from a cannon. He was then asked to throw people out of a plane (they had parachutes) before trying his hand at big game (and occasional witch) hunting. He then caused volcanic eruptions for Ed Logg and brought *Major Havoc* to the arcade market.

WARREN ROBINETT
Warren graduated form Rice University of Texas before working as a programmer for a company that studied plutonium. After then receiving a Masters from the University of California, Warren began working for Atari in 1977. His first project was *Slot Racers*, his second was an adventure game aptly named *Adventure*, it would sell over a million copies… Warren counted. Oh, and he also found time to invent the Easter egg.

DAVID CRANE
Interested in technology since he was in diapers, David admits that he was one of those annoying people that actually bothered to read instruction manuals. He began his lucrative videogame career with Atari before setting up Activision in 1979 with co-worker Alan Miller. He invented platform gaming, made the greatest movie tie-in ever and then set up Absolute Entertainment with Garry Kitchen. That, sadly, folded and now he works as chief technical officer for internet gaming company Skyworks Technologies.



» *Pac-Man* wasn't as good as the great *Ms Pac-Man*.



» Warren Robinett's wonderful *Adventure*.

"MEETING NOLAN BUSHNELL FOR THE FIRST TIME. HE SAT ACROSS FROM ME AT A GAME IN MY FIRST MONTH" OWEN RUBIN'S FONDEST ATARI MOMENT

along those lines. I believe it had a very strong impact.

David Crane: Atari brought videogames to the world. Nolan Bushnell wasn't the inventor of the videogame, but he was certainly the best marketer of the videogame. Atari took the early, entrepreneurial power of Silicon Valley and applied it to this cool, new entertainment. As great as Ralph Baer's initial inspiration was, he was pretty well tied to Magnavox at the time. I don't think the videogame business would be where it is today if television manufacturers like Magnavox had been the driving force behind games.

Warren Robinett: That's your job to assess things like that.

What's your fondest memory about working there?

Steve Wright: Working on the videogame animation for the *Superman III* movie. There were a great many technical and artistic challenges in those days creating high-resolution digital animation and getting it onto 35mm film. Of course, today, a part-time high school student can do it on a laptop computer. We were pushing the envelope, working on a big-budget Hollywood movie, travelling to Pinewood Studios in England, and hobnobbing with movie directors and film stars. Our finished sequence even played at the Siggraph Electronic Theatre that year.

Owen Rubin: Meeting Nolan Bushnell for the first time. He sat across from me at a large game (8-player *Tank*) during my first month, and I did not know who he was. He was playing the game (he and the other execs used to bet on the automated mode of the game) and he was asking me a lot of questions. I had no idea who this guy was and told him what I liked and did not like about the company already. He left after about an hour. I never understood why no one interrupted us. But afterwards, my boss came out, looked at me with a shocked expression and said, "It has been nice getting to know you." He told me this was Nolan and was shocked that I had been so candid with him. But it paid off. Nolan and I became friends, and I spent a great deal of time with him discussing Atari, as well as his other companies, too.

David Crane: My fondest memories throughout my career in videogames are of the people that I have had the pleasure of working with. Videogames require a great deal of skill and training to develop. People who work on videogames are usually the cream of the crop technically, with creative skills to match. The creative aspects usually weed out the pure nerd quickly, and the result is a mix of intelligent, well-

rounded professionals. When you are surrounded by highly intelligent, like-minded people you can have a lot of fun.

Warren Robinett: I liked the bicycle rides home, 13 miles to Menlo Park after 12-hour work days (which would be about midnight, since I usually got there at 11am), thinking about what I would add next to my game.

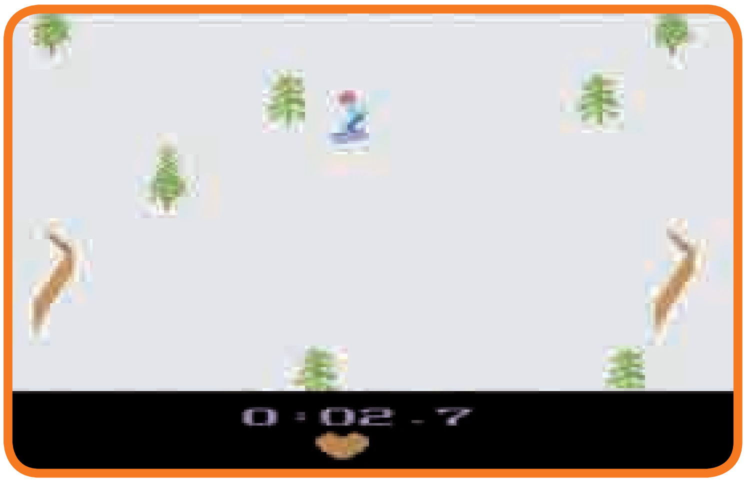
And your worst?

Steve Wright: Watching the screening of the *Superman III* sequence at Siggraph. I got separated from my team in the crush of the huge auditorium and could not find them again. This was before cell phones, you understand. After all that work, our big triumph finally played on the big screen in front of thousands, and I sat there – all alone.

Owen Rubin: Atari's middle management was the worst I have ever seen. My worst memory was having my boss tell me, when I did not finish a section of a game, "Don't worry that you did not get it done, I knew you wouldn't do it anyway." This guy was such a bad boss, he was the reason I left Atari. There were a *lot* of bad managers there, and they were mostly all friends from college so they stuck together even when they were wrong. It made for some very dysfunctional days.

David Crane: My worst moment at Atari, ironically, turned out to be one of the best things to happen to me professionally. When the president of Atari told me that, "I was no more important to the success of my videogames than the worker on the assembly line that put them together," I had nowhere to go but up. That was the impetus behind founding Activision, the genesis of third-party videogame cartridge publishing, and a lot of financial success. So I guess I should say, "Thank you Ray Kassar!"

Warren Robinett: If they'd been nice to me, they wouldn't have provoked me into hiding my signature in the game, and then I couldn't cavalierly disdain the title of Easter egg inventor.



» Epyx's *Winter* and *Summer Games* are two of the best looking games on the console, the *Summer Games* even has a psychedelic surfing event, while the *Winter Games* has this lovely looking skiing event.

"THE DAY THAT I SAT DOWN WITH A BLANK SHEET OF PAPER, DETERMINED TO FIND A USE FOR THE 'LITTLE RUNNING MAN' THAT I HAD DEVELOPED WHILE AT ACTIVISION" DAVID CRANE ON ONE OF THE DEFINING MOMENTS OF HIS CAREER

What has been the defining moment of your career?

Steve Wright: Winning my first feature film visual effects job. I went from videogames into visual effects. I had a studio in Hollywood for seven years. After a couple of years of television commercials we landed a contract to do a few visual effects for our first feature film, *Nightmare On Elm Street III*. It really felt like we had made it to the big time back then.

Owen Rubin: Being hired by Paul Allen to run his broadband research at his think tank Interval Research in Palo Alto. I do not have a PhD, but I was interviewed and accepted by a large team of people who did to be their peer. That was a great moment.

David Crane: There were a couple of moments that made a big difference in my career. The first was a career change. One evening, I had just finished playing tennis under the lights at my apartment complex in Sunnyvale, when Al Miller asked me to proofread an ad he was calling into the newspaper the next day. I read the ad and was intrigued to try my hand at videogame design for Atari. At the time I was an engineer working for National Semiconductor, but by 2pm the next day I had accepted an offer to work in Atari's 2600 design lab. The second would be the day that I sat down with a blank sheet of paper, determined to find a use for the 'little running man' that I had developed while in between games at Activision. I drew a few scribbles on that sheet of paper that would ultimately become *Pitfall!*. For many, it remains the most well known of the 68 videogames that I have designed and programmed in my 30 year career.

Warren Robinett: Probably when I chose to come to grad school at Berkeley in 1975 (over a few other schools), for no other real reason than the 'California mystique'.

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



DATAFILE

NAME: MARTIN HOLLIS
DATE OF BIRTH: 20/6/1971
FIRST JOB: PROGRAMMER AT MARINE INERTIAL SYSTEMS LTD
CURRENTLY: CEO OF ZOONAMI
FAVOURITE FILM: FLASH GORDON

MARTIN HOLLIS

HE CUT HIS CODING FINGERS ON KILLER INSTINCT, HAD A RARE OLD TIME LEADING THE GOLDENEYE AND PERFECT DARK GANG AND THEN HAD A FIDDLE WITH THE GAMECUBE WHILE IT WAS STILL IN THE WOMB. MARTIN HOLLIS TELLS PAUL DRURY ABOUT BOND, ZEN AND ZOO KEEPING

"I had a ZX81. For a day," sighs quietly spoken Martin Hollis, recalling his first encounter with the wonderful world of home computing. "It didn't work, so we sent it back. Then the replacement didn't work either…"

And we all know a coder wasn't built in a day. Thankfully for gamers everywhere, Martin's dad was a teacher and had noticed the sturdier and considerably more expensive BBC Micros that were entrancing the kids at school and opted to invest in one of those instead to help his 12-year-old son with his homework. Naïve.

"I played as many games as possible," Martin chuckles. "I devoured all the manuals and got my first game published the following year. I earned £40, which worked out at about 30p an hour."

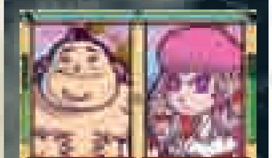
Maybe you tapped in the listing for *Father Christmas*, a festive little affair involving present delivery and deadly fir trees that appeared in the pages of *Popular Computing Weekly*. Indeed, if any magazine hoarders out there can locate this and the half dozen other type-ins he had printed in *BBC Micro User* (do *Frogger*-clone *Space Hopper* and *Android Attack*-pastiche *Easter Maze* twitch any sore fingers?), Martin would really love to hear from you.

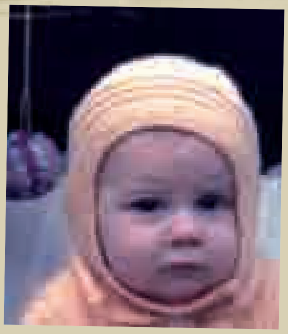
Despite this encouraging start, Martin felt that entering the games industry as a teenager would be like "running off to join the circus," and instead buckled down to more academic pursuits. He studied Maths and Computer Science at Trinity College, Cambridge, and then took a post with a small start-up company in his hometown of Frome, doing hush-hush work for the Ministry of Defence. But the young programmer soon became bored with small town Somerset and yearned for the bright lights of, erm, Twycross.

YOU MUST PLAY…

Zendoku

Rather than state the bleedin' obvious and suggest you try multiplayer *GoldenEye* or *Perfect Dark*, why not slip this quirky little title into your Nintendo DS. *Zendoku* retains the logic of its number-placing inspiration, but successfully completing a line or box sends forth an attack that your opponent must fend off through some stylus-based mini-game battling. "We had plenty of mathematicians at Zoonami and saw Sudoku gaining currency, but we didn't want to do something dull," states Martin. "So we brought in the ninjas!" A game with brains and brawn.







» **Above:** A born gamer, Martin's mum even knitted him his own Nunchuk controller. **Right:** "And this could be the internal fan…" Martin with an early GameCube prototype.



» At weekends, his name is Misaki… Martin promoting Zendoku.

"I saw an ad for Rare and they took me on, much to my surprise," he admits. "I knew about their Speccy history and that was a draw for me, but I didn't really know anything about Nintendo or consoles in general at that point. I was one of the first graduates they recruited. Was that difficult for me? Oh, I'm pretty blind when it comes to class. I just had to swear a bit and I fitted in fine."

We can only guess at the profanities he uttered when finding himself somewhat thrown in at the deep end. He was assigned to be second programmer on *Killer Instinct*, an arcade machine with innards designed to be as similar as possible to Nintendo's mysterious 'Project Reality,' which would later evolve into the Nintendo 64.

"We all knew why we were being asked to do *Killer Instinct*. It was to promote this machine that didn't exist yet. I remember seeing the early manuals for the chip that would go into the N64. I was the first person at Rare to have one in my SGI machine – they came on a board that went into your work station and there were only 50 of them in the world. Rare got sent one and it landed on my desk. That's how you develop for a machine that doesn't exist yet!"

And it was certainly a fancy bit of kit. Powered by a 64-bit CPU and the first arcade cabinet to come with its own hard drive, *Killer Instinct* punched above its weight visually and while the gameplay was clearly influenced by beat-'em-up big-hitters *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II* (the former machine was installed in the office during development and given a good bashing by the team), the game did include some sweet Rare touches.

"I WAS ONE OF THE FIRST GRADUATES RARE RECRUITED. I JUST HAD TO SWEAR A BIT AND I FITTED IN FINE"

MARTIN ON JOINING THE TWYCROSS MASSIVE

"Kevin Bayliss was responsible for *Sabre Wulf* and more than half of the characters in *Killer Instinct*," recalls Martin. "Sometimes it takes a newcomer to remind the company what cool stuff it's done in the past. A nice nod. B Orchid showing her breasts? Yes, I think that was Kevin too…"

The title definitely turned quite a few heads and was to prove particularly lucrative to Rare through both its home conversions and its sequel. But Martin was on the look out for a different sort of challenge and it came from an unexpected source, as he explains.

"A few Rare guys went to a *GoldenEye* press party organised to get people excited about the film before it started shooting. Pierce Brosnan was there, but they came back a little bit down on the idea of doing a game. I heard about it on the rumour mill and thought it sounded interesting, so I went to Tim Stamper [co-founder of Rare] with a ten-page design document about how I'd use the story, which scenarios I'd use as levels, the weapons, but without actually mentioning the genre. After some convincing, I got the nod…"

Martin was clear about one thing though. "I knew it would be a mistake to do too many things, like having a skiing section, a racing section, even a 'get the girl into bed' section. No, this was going to be a game about shooting."

So Martin began to assemble his team. He consciously recruited fresh talent to the company, people not tied stylistically to previous Rare work. This was to be a very different game from *Donkey Kong Country* and *Battletoads*. While he did contribute some hard code, his key responsibility was keeping the project alive, particularly as the release date for *GoldenEye* slipped ever further past the movie premiere.

"We had incredible support from Rare and Nintendo and they left us alone to a remarkable extent," acknowledges Martin. "The third time we were late though, I got a fax from Howard Lincoln [head of Nintendo of America] saying how unacceptable it was to tell retailers it wouldn't be ready for Christmas. I think that's when I upped my working hours to 120 a week…"

Good things come to those who wait, of course. *GoldenEye* was finally completed in the summer of 1997 and went on to be one of the defining games of the decade. With sales in excess of eight million copies, the talk of producing a sequel was understandable, but as much as the team loved the Bond universe, the thought of spending another three years immersed in it left them shaken and unstirred.

"We wanted to step out of that pigeonhole and we felt a game centred on a strong female lead could be interesting," says Martin on the creation of Joanna Dark.

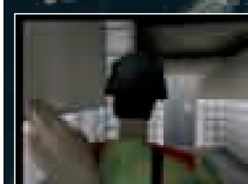


» Puzzle battler *Zendoku*, shown here on the PSP.



GOLDEN TOUCH

"I'm not a fan of the vision word, but that probably describes it best," says Martin on his role heading up the *GoldenEye* development team. "We worked extremely well together. All these talented people really gelled. Yes, there were heated arguments, but not too many." Indeed, the team became such an efficient coding unit that after Martin's departure from Rare, the majority of them, including previous castaways David Doak and Steve Ellis, similarly left Twycross behind to found Free Radical Design. Their impressive *TimeSplitters* series and the forthcoming *Haze* suggest they learned a thing or two about producing quality first-person shooters under Martin's stewardship. For the full story of The Making of *GoldenEye*, see **Retro Gamer** 38 and point your browser in the direction of www.zoonami.com for Martin's detailed account of the creation of this seminal shooter. You'll find plenty on his company's past and future plans, too. I wonder if anyone's taking bets on whether its next project is for the Wii?

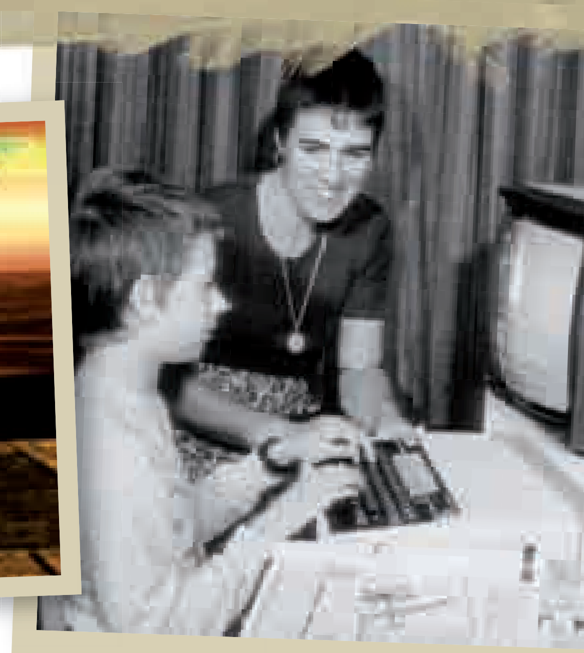




» *Sabre Wulf* had grown considerably since his Speccy youth…



» *Killer Instinct*'s Cinder uses her Ready Brek combo breaker.



» 'It's this or cleaning chimneys son…' Martin and his mum collaborated on 'The Magic Sword' in 1984.

"There's a poverty of them in videogames, so we looked at television and film. I think you can see some of the *X-Files*' Scully and Nikita in there."

Perfect Dark could draw on fresh creative influences but it still had to run on the same machine and the team soon realised they had pushed the hardware to its limits with their auspicious debut. "We had big ambitions but were getting diminishing returns," he says. "We spent a year working on the look, especially the lighting and double-layered rendering that made textures like the chrome look lovely, but you paid for everything in frame rate."

Technical frustrations were compounded with the realisation that the project was going to take much longer to complete than originally planned, resulting in what Martin diplomatically calls a "falling out" with the Stamper brothers. He left Rare and this time he gave free reign to his wanderlust. He travelled extensively throughout South East Asia, but while enjoying a Sling in Singapore, he got the kind of phone call that you knock your drink back quickly for. It was from Nintendo, asking him to come over to its American HQ in Redmond, Washington State, to join the team designing its new console, the GameCube.

Martin was asked to bring a game developer's viewpoint to the project, so we momentarily get all Jeremy Paxman and ask whether, given that the relative failure of the GameCube has often been attributed to a lack of third-party software support, was it actually all his fault?

He laughs. "I'm still not clear what happened. The GameCube was superbly well designed for the price, but it hadn't got the momentum. The N64 had been very hard to develop for and a lot of game developers had lost money. Nintendo wasn't going to change its business model, so they went with the competition. The GameCube had that paired-down design like the Wii, but it didn't have that 'something else' that the Wii has."

So, rather than taking the logical step of coding for the console he has helped write the manuals for, Martin tried something else himself. Fulfilling a long-held ambition, he set up his own company, Zoonami, in 2000. "I knew it would be hard, but I was comfortable doing it on my own," he says. "I wanted to take risks, not do sequels and be prepared to shelve projects. A lot of our work is best classified as R&D and, so far, much of it isn't with consumers, but we've continued to develop in a low-key way…"

Martin is the first to admit the last seven years haven't always been particularly easy, but true to his word, Zoonami's four published titles have all been original IP. Last year, the company released *Go! Puzzle*, a trio of puzzlers downloadable for the PS3 and also brought together the unlikely pairing of ninjas and Sudoku with *Zendoku* for the DS. Then there's *Funkydilla*, an intriguing one-button rhythm-action title that is "currently maturing nicely in our cheese cellar" and with firm foundations laid down, he remains admirably enthused about Zoonami's future.

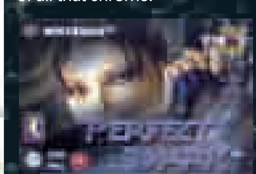
"I remember first seeing the Wii at E3 in 2005 and I had the biggest smile imaginable on my face. Will we be doing a Wii game?" Martin gives us a suitably enigmatic pause before concluding, "That's a reasonable question…"

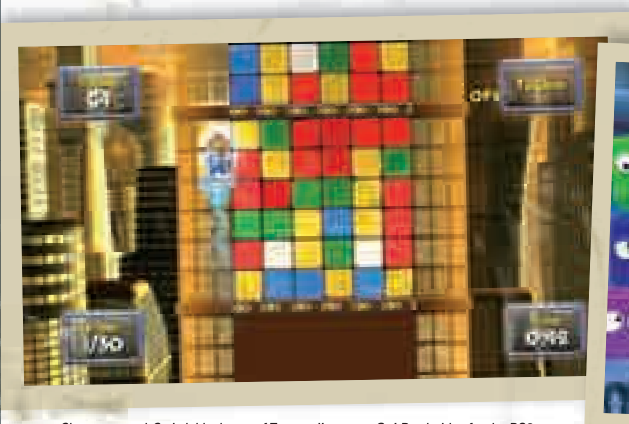
"THE THIRD TIME GOLDENEYE WAS LATE, I GOT A FAX FROM HOWARD LINCOLN [HEAD OF NINTENDO AMERICA] SAYING HOW UNACCEPTABLE IT WAS. I UPPED MY WORKING HOURS TO 120 A WEEK…"

MARTIN GETS A SERIOUS LETTER FROM AMERICA

DARK DAYS

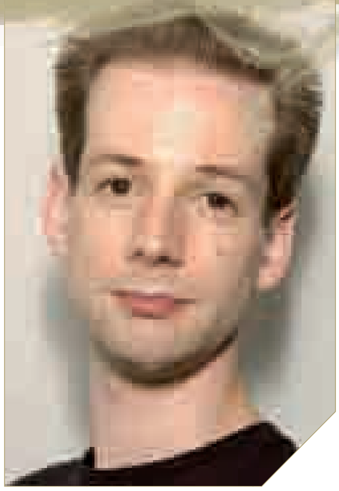
After 14 months heading up the high profile development of *Perfect Dark*, Martin reached an impasse with his employers. "The plan was to use the old *GoldenEye* engine and have it done in a year," he explains. "It became clear it was going to take much longer. I was happy to persevere and wanted to see the end of the project but I told the Stamper brothers I wanted to leave at some point. I was looking for an exit strategy and that just wasn't acceptable to them. We had a falling out and to cut a convoluted story short, I left." We wonder how similar the *Perfect Dark* he left behind was to the finished game that finally arrived in the summer of 2000? "Most of the levels were done, though not complete, the modelling was done and about 90 per cent of the weapons were there – those crazy alien weapons came later. What wasn't there was the AI and the wealth of multiplayer options, which added to the game a great deal. I think that made it a better game than *GoldenEye* in many respects." Arriving during the N64's twilight years, the game didn't match the success of its spiritual predecessor, but *Perfect Dark* still shines very brightly indeed… and not only because of all that chrome.







» *Skyscraper* and *Swizzleblock*, two of Zoonami's recent *Go! Puzzle* titles for the PS3.

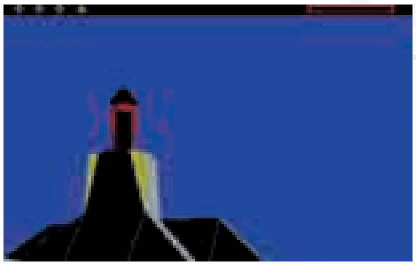


MARTIN HOLLIS DESERT ISLAND DISKS



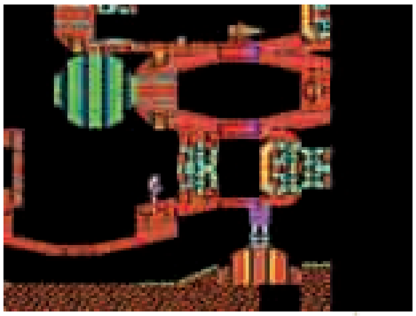
REPTON 2 BBC MICRO

1 For many people, it's the worst of the first three, which are boulder-based puzzle games, but I really like it. It had a ludicrously huge world and you only had three lives, which meant you had to play perfectly for something like 16 hours. A real challenge and yeah, I did it. No, I think I missed a diamond right at the end and didn't feel like doing it again.



THE SENTINEL BBC MICRO

2 'Sir' Geoff Crammond ported it to the Beeb from the C64 himself. A completely original and surreal game with a really powerful emotion in it. With 10,000 levels, it would be great for a desert island.



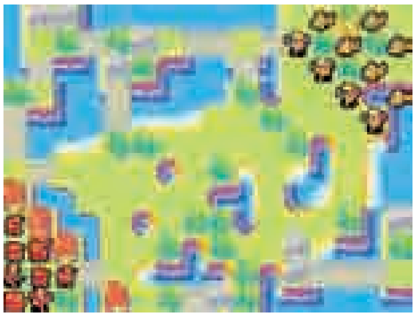
EXILE BBC MICRO

3 The dying gasp of games on the BBC. A physics-based game with a side-on view of a spaceman in a system of caverns. I got about halfway through but just couldn't get the radiation pill from the little cubby hole it was in. I spent about four hours trying to fly through. An amazing game and rock hard – some of the puzzles require you to be a nuclear physicist!



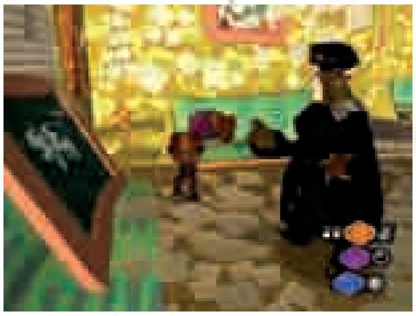
SUPER METROID SNES

4 I haven't actually played this but I really want to, so it's logical to take it to the island. I'm 100 per cent confident it's absolutely brilliant. Enormous and a huge challenge, so it should take up a few evenings.



ADVANCE WARS DS

5 On a DS, please. An incredible game. The rules are simple but very generative and there are so many ways to win on a map. You could spend forever optimising your play on a single map and there are hundreds. And then you can make your own!



PSYCHONAUTS PS2

6 Another I've not played. I thought it would be good to have a game about going insane, because I'd be going crazy on my own on the island. Yes, I'd try to escape. And I would succeed.



ANIMAL CROSSING GAMECUBE

7 A huge game with the whole world in it. And the world is so friendly and warm. It would help keep me sane.



NETHACK PC

8 A game that keeps coming back. It's not very 'console' and has no real graphics or sound. It's about learning the rules of this dungeon – the magic and the mythological creatures that reside in it. It's a game for scientists and designers. The interactivity between the objects – everything works with something else you don't know about. And when you die, you forget and you have to discover again. You really die!

› MARTIN HOLLIS

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE



Merman: How would you describe your time working at Rare and was it a good environment for writing and developing games?
Based on the results, it was very obviously a good environment. They certainly encouraged you to work very, very hard. The concept of 'work-life balance' wasn't one they understood.

Northway: Is it a frustrating experience to begin a new and hush-hush project that is enormously powerful compared to current stuff, and then see how time passes by and Moore's Law chugs on and ups the list of what PCs and competing consoles can do while your game is still not finished?
Colourfully put! Is it frustrating? There are frustrations in every job but I've been surprised by how many people really have been damaged by the games industry. But I don't feel that. I feel positive and can't help looking forward.

LeeT: Are you annoyed at the relative failure of the Nintendo GameCube?
A little bit disappointed, but then it all comes down to games. That is a cliché, I know, but it's true. It had some great games but just not enough.

Nitters: What's it like being part of a successful videogame project – especially one of the best film to videogame translations of all time?
Very good! Is there an intelligent answer to that?

Ritchardo mkII: Which Bond film do you think would've given you enough creative material to make the best game?
It was so nice to have an open brief on *GoldenEye* so we could plunder a few things from other films. There are a lot and they're not as formulaic as people think, so it's hard not just to pick my favourite Bond film. As for the best scenario for a game, I'd say the boiling mud in *Diamonds Are Forever.*

Paranoid Marvin: Why didn't you follow the rest of the *GoldenEye* gang to FRD and did you notice any of your ideas being used by them in the creation of *TimeSplitters*?
[laughs] Chronologically they left before me so I couldn't follow them. Did they use any of my ideas? I think it was me who said it would be good to have the health display round the screen, but what's an idea? Does it really belong to anyone? We have a deep well of mutual respect but no, there's never been talk of me moving to FRD. And anyway, Nottingham – it's a nice town in many ways but I'm really picky about where I live these days.

MC1: Which game do you prefer on multiplayer, *Perfect Dark* or *GoldenEye*?
For me, *GoldenEye* has more of a fun factor. *Perfect Dark* has more to it and is probably better for the hardcore gamer, but I'm not. Running around with Klobbs in 'first shot kills' mode does it for me.

Felgekarp: What's your favourite joystick/pad?
Great question! I never really liked any joystick. They'd always break, even playing *Aviator* on the BBC. I think joysticks equal bad, thumbsticks equal okay, so I'll go for the N64 – predictably.

Elgin_McQueen: What was GameZero?
It was an R&D project that went through a number of different iterations. I think that's all I can say on it. Oh, all these secrets. I wish it wasn't so.

Yethboth: What retro game would you most like to remake and why?
Another great question. Oh, there are so many. I'll say *Thrust.* It's really dangerous to remake something that works so well in 2D and try and bring it into the 21st Century. A lot of people try unsuccessfully. But I love it so much – the purity of it – and it would be such fun.

PantalOOns: Was it always your goal to start your own company and was the lack of originality in the industry a contributing factor?
Starting my own endeavour had always been in the back of my mind since I was a child and yes, I definitely felt angry at the lack of originality in the industry as a whole. There were some glittering stars of exception, but it seemed like fewer and fewer.

The Master: Who is your favourite Doctor Who?
This is an important question. Tom Baker.

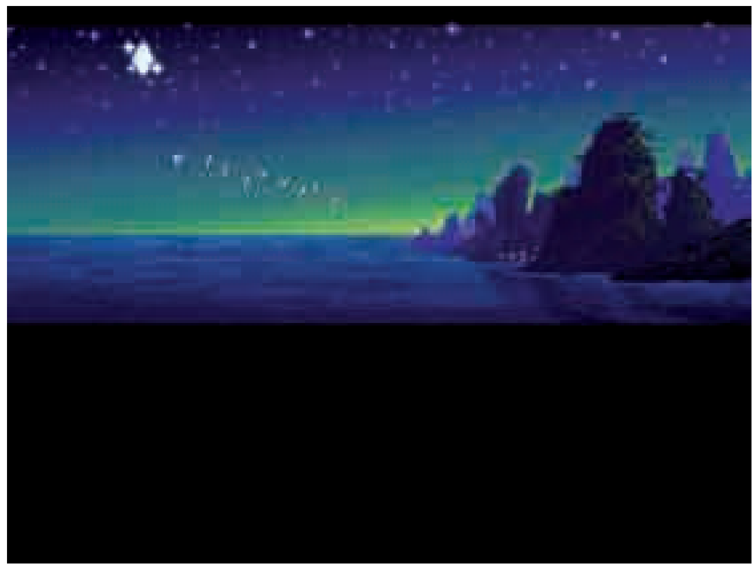
For your chance to quiz future castaways please visit the **Retro Gamer** forums at www.retrogamer.net/forum

THE MAKING OF...

LOOM

With a blend of mystery and an air of wonder, Loom is a magical tale woven together with clever puzzles and compelling narrative. 'Professor' Brian Moriarty reveals to Kim Wild how a love of ballet scores led to the creation of a musical masterpiece that has so far yet to be surpassed





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
» **DEVELOPER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10

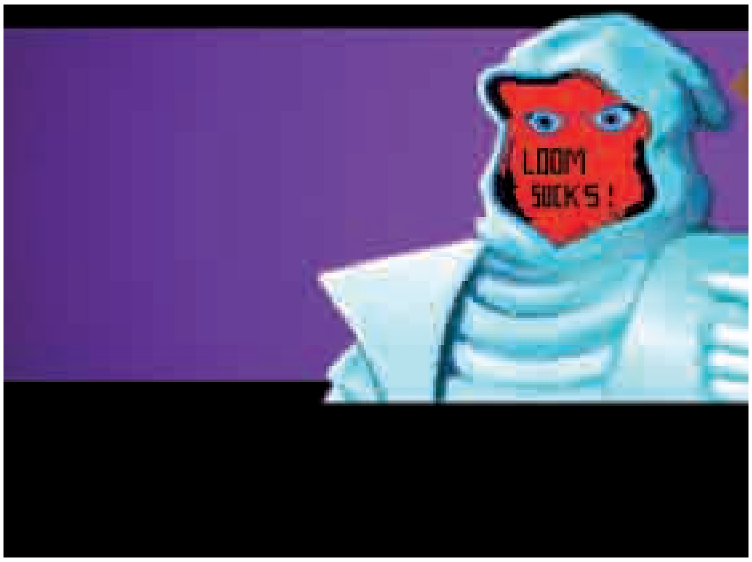


"It was long after the passing of the second shadow, when dragons ruled the twilight sky, and the stars were bright and numerous." These enigmatic words set the scene for *Loom*, beginning the story of Bobbin Threadbare, an innocent young Weaver belonging to a Guild that have the ability to weave the fabric of time with the power of music. Yet the Weaver's era is quickly passing, with many dying out due to their old ways and few of the Guilds remain. In an act of rebellion, a young woman weaved a new pattern to give birth to a son, but was condemned shortly after his birth to live the rest of her life as a swan. Yet the pattern has started to rip apart the fabric and it is up to Bobbin Threadbare to make sure that the unravelling doesn't spell the demise of the Universe.

The story of Bobbin Threadbare is a tightly woven tale, full of depth and mystery that remains compelling due to the clever way the music is entwined into the narrative. Yet while the name Bobbin Threadbare (a bobbin is a cylinder or comb used in weaving for holding thread) and subsequent characters Fleece and Rusty seemed planned, they were initially only meant as a temporary measure. "Bobbin, Fleece, Rusty and most of the other names were just temporary place holders," says the game's designer Brian Moriarty. "I intended to replace them with something more serious sounding. But in the end, the original names stuck. The characters had grown into them. The Elders (Lachesis, Atropos and Clothos) are named after the three Fates of classical mythology."

It's the word *Loom* itself that actually sparked Brian's imagination. "I like the sound of it, and the many ideas it brings to mind. Once I recognised that it would make an evocative title, the rest just followed. It is very mysterious, where these things come from." After a brief surge of inspiration, Brian put some ideas onto paper. "I wrote a brief document, maybe four or five pages, that outlined the basic story and showed it around. People seemed to like it, so we took the project into production."

What makes *Loom* stand out from the beginning is that there isn't an actual inventory: Bobbin Threadbare carries a mere disstaff which will help him save the Guilds from the impending clash with Chaos and it's this disstaff's innate musical ability that will solve the various puzzles he encounters. Bobbin Threadbare will never pick up a single item or choose from a dialog tree to trick a non-playable character, instead focusing on musical spells to solve puzzles. The use of a staff came about from trying to accomplish something different with the SCUMM system. "I mucked around for a week or two with different ideas until the musical staff appeared," says Brian. "Once I knew the interface would be musical, I came up with the list of magic spells and the



» [PC CD version] An unused piece of artwork reveals a designer's wrath.



» [FM Town version] Another scene present in all versions excluding the PC CD remake.

associated melodies, some of which could be reversed. The final puzzles evolved from the list of spells. I wanted to see if I could move away from the pragmatic, object-oriented approach of previous games, into the realm of abstract ideas, like music and magic."

As a result, a pen and some paper is needed to write down the notes to the drafts, so that you can play the correct sequence of notes for the right effect. It's a nice touch and calls to mind using paper to map out levels in old RPGs like *Eye of the Beholder*. Acquired spells can also be reversed to accomplish different results (casting the opposite of dye will bleach cloth, for example). Like many of LucasArts' releases, it is impossible to die, leaving it up to the player to explore the magical world. The three difficulty levels ensure that gamers of all skill levels are catered for, with Expert proving a real challenge, relying entirely on the player's ability to compose the drafts solely by ear, which is sure to delight those who are musically inclined.

Although in today's climate, the mystical visuals of *Loom* may seem less than breathtaking, at the time of its release they were ground-breaking, even more impressively so when you realise they were created with just 16 colours. While the CD release may be more awe-inspiring with the upgrade to a 256 colour palette, there is still something charming about the look of the characters and the imaginative locations. Brian's love of ballet owes much to the fairy-tale feel that the game so enraptures.

"When the project started, I spent quite a bit of time with lead animator Gary Winnick and background artist Mark Ferrari, discussing possible styles," explains Brian. "I think it was Gary who first suggested that we take a look at Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (which also happens to be based on a Tchaikovsky ballet, and uses the ballet's music). *Sleeping Beauty* has a very striking look, unlike any other Disney feature. Walt reportedly wanted it to look like a moving tapestry. It was designed by the artist Eyvind Earle, with abstract shapes and flat planes of colour. Mark adapted the look to the limited 16-colour EGA palette with amazing results. When the game was first shown at the 1990 Consumer Electronics Show, many critics swore that they were seeing a 256-colour game!"

His love affair with *Swan Lake* ("*Swan Lake* is one of my favourites, very dark and moody, and with haunting melodies. I don't remember how or when I decided to make it such a prominent part of *Loom*, but it fits so perfectly I can't imagine the game without it.") meant that many elements from the ballet, from the swans themselves to the inclusion of owls and musical excerpts as backing accompaniment, became an integral part of the whole *Loom* experience. The inclusion of *Swan Lake* as a piece of music not only fits the game's setting; it's also an example of culture transcending the videogame medium. Of the criticisms aimed at computer games throughout the generations for being unimaginative, *Loom* stands out proudly as being an example of what games can accomplish with taking creative cues from other entertainment forms with prowess. If a criticism could

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MANIAC MANSION
SYSTEMS: C64, NES, AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC
YEAR: 1987

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: PC, AMIGA
YEAR: 1990

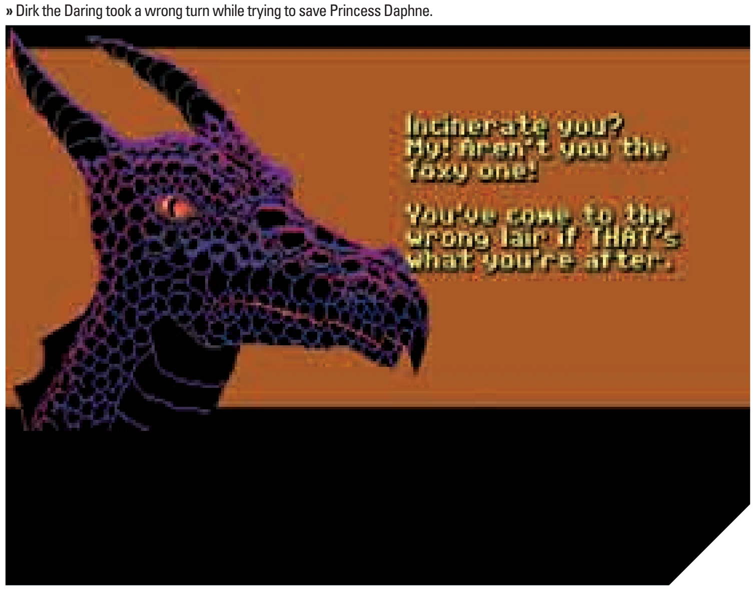
THE DIG
SYSTEM: PC, MAC
YEAR: 1995



» Practice mode, handily aimed at novice game players.



» Dirk the Daring took a wrong turn while trying to save Princess Daphne.



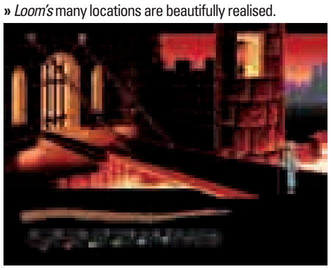
THE MAKING OF... LOOM

ASK ME ABOUT LOOM

LucasArts adventures are infamous for containing jokes referencing their wares and *Loom* is particularly prominent in *Monkey Island*. At the SCUMM Bar, one sinister pirate called Cobb (making a guest appearance) offers a little speech about the merits of *Loom*, while a lone seagull has flown in from the world of Loom to play havoc with a piece of fish. Guybrush utters the immortal words, "I'm Bobbin Threadbare, are you my mother?" after being shot out of a cannon. An encounter with Meathook echoes the theme with the dialogue, "I'm Bobbin Threadbare. Are you my mother?" "No, your mother was a duck." There is also a subtle reference in *Maniac Mansion* (NES version), where a broken record is called '*The Soundtrack Of Loom*'. The in-game references were something of a surprise to Brian Moriarty. "They put them in without telling me. I found out after the game was released."

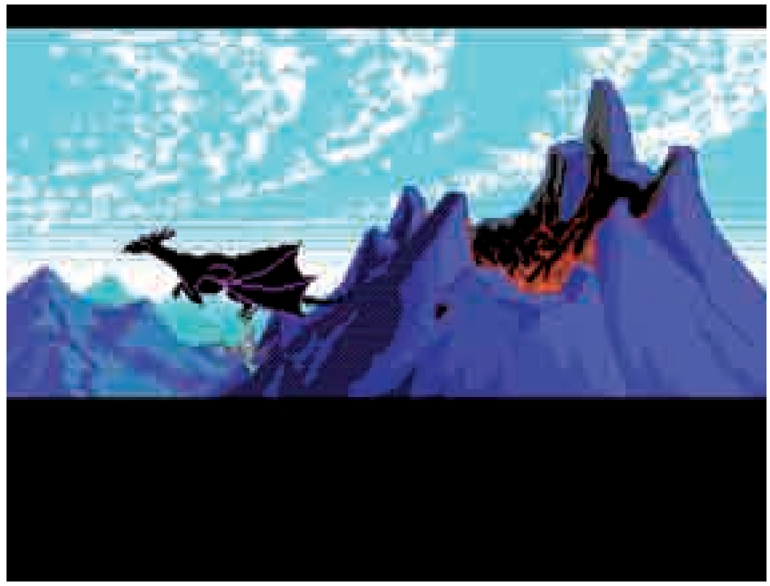


» *Loom's* many locations are beautifully realised.



be levelled at *Loom* it is that the game can be completed within a matter of hours, yet the journey of wonderment and finely tuned narrative ensures that not a second feels wasted.

In some ways, Brian's reputation within the videogame industry matches the wonder of his creation. Before his time at LucasArts, he was responsible for the creation of three epic Infocom adventures, *Wishbringer* (1985), *Trinity* (1986) and *Beyond Zork* (1988), which are still hailed by fans of the genre as examples of epic storytelling. Dubbed with the moniker of 'Professor' Moriarty as a child after the evil nemesis of Sherlock Holmes, the youngster developed a keen eye for new technology. "My first 'computer' was one I built myself, when I was in fifth grade (about ten years old)," recalls Brian. "It used marbles rolling along grooves in a piece of wood to demonstrate simple logic. A few years later, I built a better version using switches and light bulbs. I told people I could use the primitive thing to predict baseball scores, and got my photo in the local newspaper. Two valuable lessons were learned from these projects. One, I enjoy electronics more than carpentry. Two, adults are gullible, and can be made to believe almost anything you tell them. Much later, I learned to program a TRS-80 while working at a Radio Shack store in 1978. But the first computer I actually bought was an Atari 800 with 48K of RAM and a disk drive, in 1981."



» First Class Dragon Airways: it's the only way to travel.

"IT COMES FROM PROFESSOR MORIARTY, THE EVIL NEMESIS OF DOYLE'S SHERLOCK HOLMES"

BRIAN MORIARTY ON BEING TAGGED 'PROFESSOR' MORIARTY

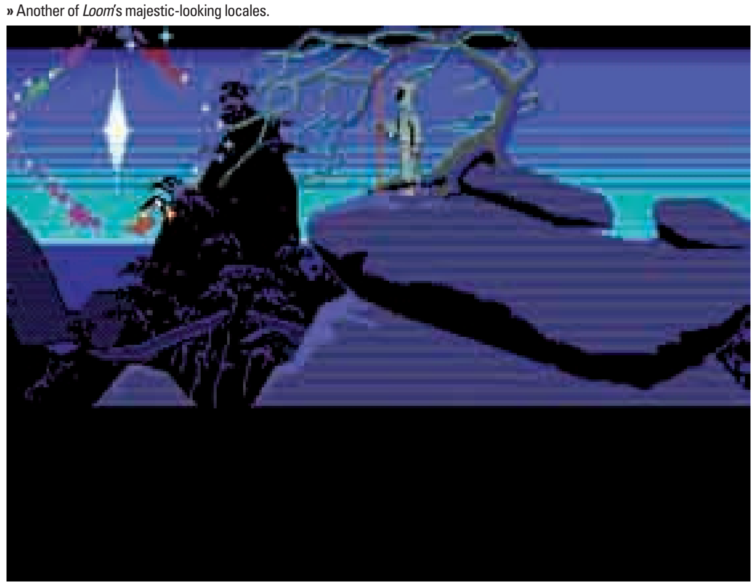
His entrance into the computer industry wouldn't come until later. After working as an editor at *Analog Computing* magazine, he played Infocom's *Deadline*, which led to a position as a technician at Infocom before his short span of game creation. After completion of *Beyond Zork*, an encounter at the 1988 West Coast Computer Faire resulted in his arrival at LucasArts. "I went to see a lecture by game designer Chris Crawford. I arrived late. The only seat left in the room was in the front row, beside a fellow who introduced himself as Noah Falstein, a designer at Lucasfilm Games. We got talking, one thing led to another, and I eventually found myself moving to California in August 1988 to work at Skywalker Ranch. Lucasfilm Games (as the division was originally known) had attracted a number of really talented people. People like Ron, Tim and Dave combined the ability to make up fun stories and puzzles with the technical skill needed to bring their ideas to life. It was an amazing group, and I was very proud to be working with them."

After its original release on the PC, which also came bundled with an audio drama tape that provided backstory to

» Just one of the locations Bobbin Threadbare will encounter on his journey.



» Another of *Loom's* majestic-looking locales.





» Despite the serious, *Loom* had some sharp-witted humour (sorry).

the game's mythology, *Loom* went on to capture the hearts of Amiga and Mac users while receiving a considerable revamp with a CD-ROM release on the PC. Despite a 15-month development span, Brian still felt that more time would have been useful. "I would have loved to spend more time on it. There are lots of places where it could have used some refinement. But at some point you have to finish things, and the 70-hour weeks were beginning to annoy my wife."

Despite being overshadowed by *The Secret Of Monkey Island* at the time of its release, *Loom* still did very well for itself and ended up selling over half-a-million copies across all formats. Its cliffhanger ending also ensured that there was room for a continuation of the story. "There was talk of two sequels," comments Brian. "The first, called '*Forge*', was about Rusty Nailbender leading an underground movement to overthrow Chaos, who has taken control of his home city. The second sequel, called '*The Fold*', was about Fleece Firmflanks teaming up with Rusty and the rest of the Guilds to fight a final, apocalyptic battle. Bobbin was going to make guest appearances in both games." Unfortunately, Brian's involvement in other projects and lack of interest from other members of the team meant that the sequels never moved beyond the concept stage.

"ONE, I ENJOY ELECTRONICS MORE THAN CARPENTRY. TWO, ADULTS ARE GULLIBLE AND CAN BELIEVE ANYTHING" BRIAN ON HIS VALUABLE LESSONS LEARNED

While Brian now follows a different path to his adventure game leanings ("I've worked in a number of game companies since then, and also spent three years as a science educator. Nowadays I'm a producer at ImaginEngine, a company that chiefly makes entertainment software for kids.") he still tends to keep a keen eye on the development of the genre. "My favourite of the classic graphic adventures is *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*, and also *Grim Fandango*," he admits. "I've been watching the evolution of the genre with interest over the years, and I'm hoping that the internet will allow players who still love adventure games to connect with designers who love to make them. I suspect there is still a large enough market to support a healthy mini-industry."

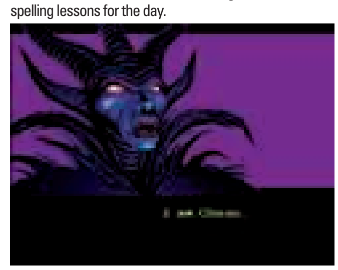
As the story draws to a close, Bobbin Threadbare is caught up in the final confrontation with Chaos. Picking up the black, lonesome feather from Mother Hetchel, Bobbin learns the 'Unmaking' spell and uses it on the stunning Loom. The pattern of time is torn irrevocably, leaving half the Universe trapped in its wake. With nothing, Bobbin transcends into a magnificent swan and flies away to begin a new era, with Chaos left wanting. "Fly away while you can Weaver Boy. One day we will meet again." Maybe one day that 'promise' will finally be fulfilled.

A DIFFERENT PATTERN

While it comes to be expected that there will be differences between formats, what is amazing is how contrasting some of these actually are. The floppy version of *Loom* on PC (similar on Amiga and Mac, just with reduced colour palettes and inferior sound) remains the most complete, featuring all scenes and dialogue. PC-Engine's release is similar to the floppy with higher quality graphics and sound. In terms of atmosphere, the PC CD-ROM version is unparalleled (and also very rare and highly sought-after) with fantastic voice acting, and Tchaikovsky's music is made more powerful due to CD quality, but lack of space has ensured many of the lines have been rewritten and cut-scenes shortened in length. Curiously, the FM Towns version includes all of the scenes edited from the PC release and features CD-quality music and full dialogue, missing only the voice acting.



» [PC CD] It seems that evil entities forget to attend spelling lessons for the day.



» **Left and right:** The first screen shows the scene in its entirety compared to the close up of the graphically superior PC CD edition.

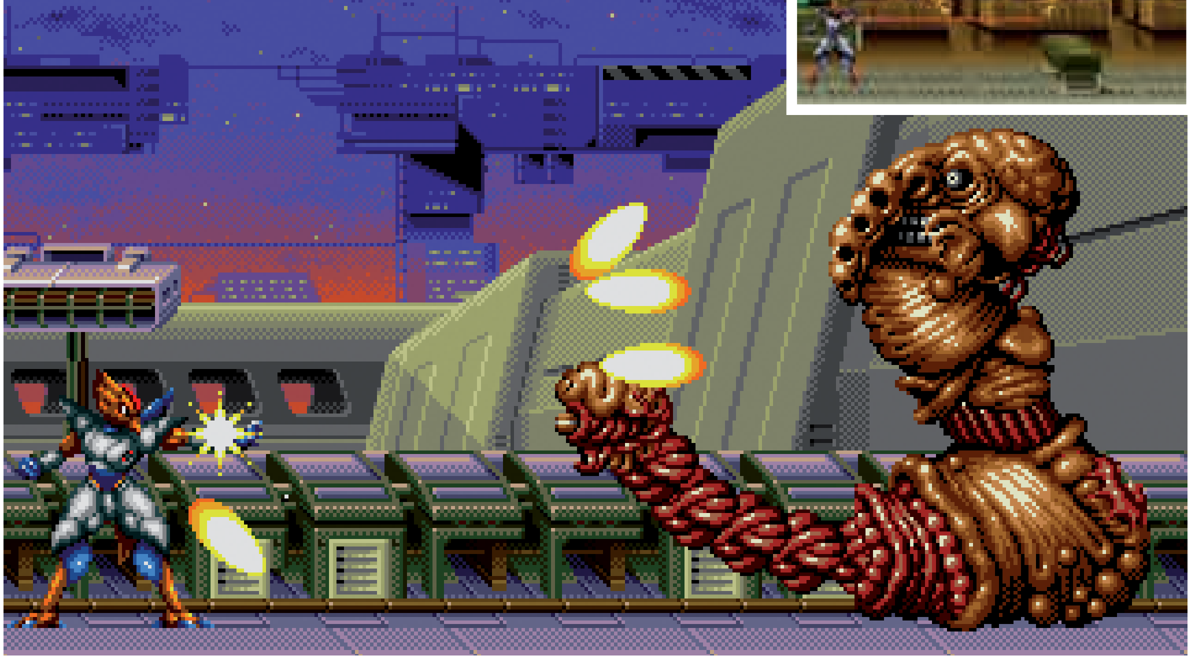






The Virtual Console is certainly starting to prove its worth. While the lack of a 60 hertz option on original PAL games remains a sore point, there are some incredible games available on the system. We're also starting to see titles from the Neo Geo, and PC Engine CD-ROM catalogues. How long before other classic consoles and computers start arriving on Nintendo's popular online service? The answer is a lot soon than you think…

ALIEN SOLDIER



High-quality presentation values and clever level design set this apart from the crowd.



INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE »
» **COST:** 800 POINTS »
FIRST RELEASED: 1995
60 HERTZ: NO

When Retro Gamer issue 44 finally hit newsstands, the first thing people wanted to know was why Treasure's Alien Soldier didn't make our Top 25. The answer, of course, is simple. We just felt that the 25 choices we had made were better…

It is easy to understand why Treasure's 16-bit run-and-gun title is still held in such high regard though, and while it's obviously a technically polished title, that alone wasn't enough to see it enter our prestigious Hall of Fame.

There's nothing wrong with the Boss Rush aspect of *Alien Soldier*, in fact, that's one of the things that makes it so refreshing to play. No, it's the fact that the vast majority of bosses can be defeated with a simple dash attack that really gets our goat. Wait for him to move toward you, pump him full of as much lead as possible, and then, when he prepares to return fire, simply dash behind him and continue your assault. Ad infinitum. Granted, some of the later levels do require a more significant degree of skill to complete, but many games will be lost due to *Alien Soldier*'s fiddly weapon-select system, as opposed to the toughness of the actual game.



Complicated control issues aside, there are still a great many reasons why we've thoroughly enjoyed re-visiting this very enjoyable blaster. The game's presentation throughout is absolutely superb and the soundtrack consists of plenty of funky rifts that suit the on-screen action perfectly, while the visuals are genuinely spectacular. Sprites are enormous and impressively animated, everything races along at a breathtaking pace and the design for many of the gigantic enemies is quintessential Treasure fare. This is quite possibly the company's most technically polished game on Sega's 16-bit Mega Drive and once again demonstrates what a talented team they are.

While it's not the greatest run-and-gun we've ever played, *Alien Soldier* is certainly an exhilarating roller coaster ride of a game, and another crucial edition to your Virtual Console library.

PRESENTATION: 88% Impossibly slick, with a variety of options and an easy-to-navigate menu.

AESTHETICS: 96% Quite possibly one of Mega Drive's best looking titles. Bosses in particular are brilliantly animated and bursting with originality.

PLAYABILITY: 75% Treasure has crammed a lot of options into three fire buttons and as a result gameplay is very clunky.

LONGEVITY: 65% Once you've worked out how easy the bosses are there's little incentive to beat previous scores.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 86% Considering how expensive the original Mega Drive PAL release is, 800 Points is something of a bargain.

OVERALL 84%

BLUE'S JOURNEY

INFORMATION

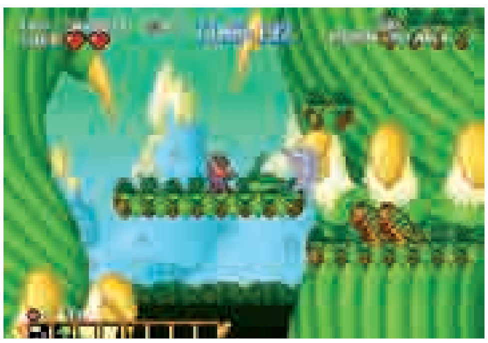
» **DEVELOPER:** ALPHA » **FIRST RELEASED:** 1991
» **COST:** 900 POINTS » **60 HERTZ:** NO

Remember the contestants on X-Factor who spent their entire lives being told by friends and family how good they are, only to have their dreams cruelly dashed by Simon Cowell? Well that's how Blue's Journey must feel.

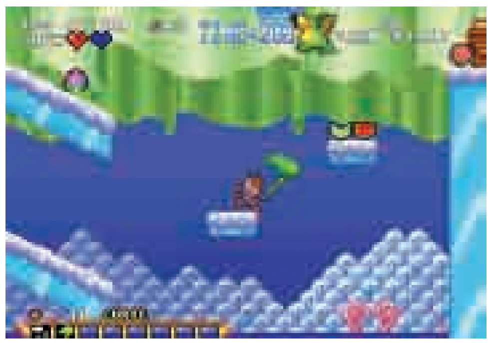
Back in the days of the AES, *Blue's Journey* was one of the machine's most popular platformers (probably because it had no real competition). That was then though. Arriving on the Wii, the game suddenly has to compete with genuine classics like *Super Mario World* and *Super Mario Bros 3* and suddenly he's looking rather long in the tooth.

This may be one of the earlier AES titles, but when you consider the power of the machine, there's no reason why *Blue's Journey* should look as generic as it does. There's an ice world, a forest world, an industrial world… It's platforming by numbers and about as exciting as being slapped across the face with a kipper.

Admittedly, *Blue's Journey* does boast a reasonably enjoyable play mechanic – you can shrink to reach otherwise-inaccessible areas – but it has been used so infrequently that developer Alpha may as well not have bothered. Add to that some dull level design and the sort of clunky controls that wouldn't look out of place on one of those fairground grabbing machines and *Blue's Journey* isn't fit enough to lick Mario's boots, let alone actually compete with him.



» Once a popular console seller, *Blue's Journey* is now just an OAP.



» Had the play mechanic been used to a greater extent, this could have been fun.



PRESENTATION: 51% A basic-looking front end and littered with the sort of generic characters that a Japanese designer could produce in his sleep.

AESTHETICS: 57% Considering the graphical grunt of the AES, this is very disappointing. Amazingly, the sound is even worse.

PLAYABILITY: 45% The game's pointless play mechanic that's married to super-slidey controls more suited to an ice rink.

LONGEVITY: 35% Why would you want to spend time on something that's clearly no fun to play?

VALUE FOR MONEY: 45% While 900 Points is a good price for a Neo-Geo game, there are far better platformers available on VC.

OVERALL 49%

MAGICIAN LORD

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** ALPHA » **FIRST RELEASED:** 1991
» **COST:** 900 POINTS » **60 HERTZ:** NO

Considering the great games available on the AES, the VC isn't do the machine justice at all. You could argue that the current games are chosen due to their small file sizes, but it simply gives the AES a bad name.

Magician Lord is a classic example of an AES release that was reasonably well received back in the day but now looks and plays like the dinosaur that it is. Similar in style to Capcom's *Ghost 'N Goblins* series, *Magician Lord* has you jumping spikes, climbing ladders, using magic and, occasionally, changing into a variety of different humanoids.

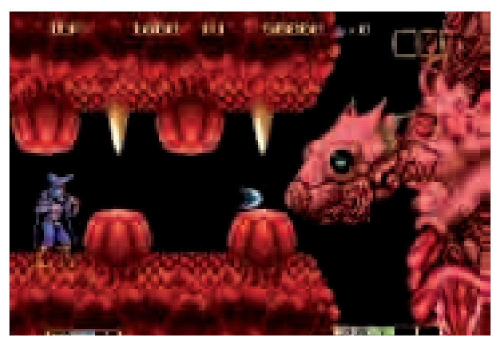
The biggest problem with this title is that it's too damned hard. Now, we're no gaming virgins (we've completed *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*) but we got fed up with the sheer difficulty of *Magician Lord*. Your blue-robed wizard is so huge and graceless that it becomes virtually impossible to dodge certain attacks. Add in further annoyances such as the clunky control system and painfully protracted level design and you're left with another aging platformer that's not worth the time it takes to download. And to think gamers once paid over £100 for this.



» All the elements were in place for a decent platformer…



» …then came the massive wizard character and high difficulty level…



» …and endless frustration ensued.

PRESENTATION: 38% Dull menus and rubbish cut-scenes sealed *Magician Lord*'s fate.

AESTHETICS: 65% Later levels are quite inventive and the music isn't bad. But it's still poor for an AES game.

PLAYABILITY: 51% Naff controls, enemies that are stupidly hard to avoid and disappointing level design all add up to a frustrating experience.

LONGEVITY: 45% The insane difficulty factor will put you off putting any real time into *Magician Lord*.

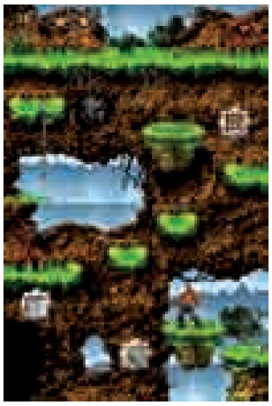
VALUE FOR MONEY: 45% Cheap for an AES game, but there are far better, cheaper platformers on VC.

OVERALL 47%

» THE LEGENDARY CONTRA MAKES ITS WAY ON TO THE HANDHELD

CONTRA 4

THE WAY FORWARD?



- » **SYSTEM:** DS
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** WAYFORWARD
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» Once you have acclimatised to the new grappling hook, you start to wonder how you ever managed to live without it.

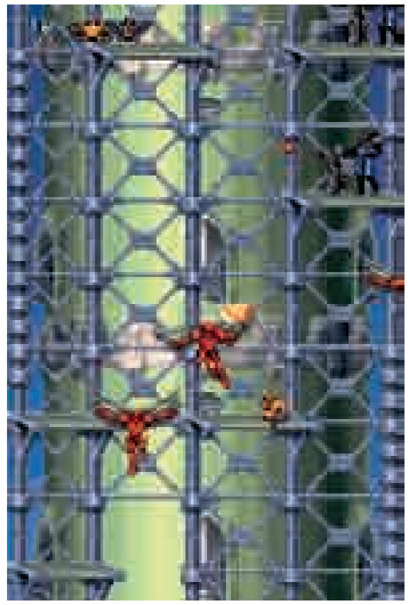




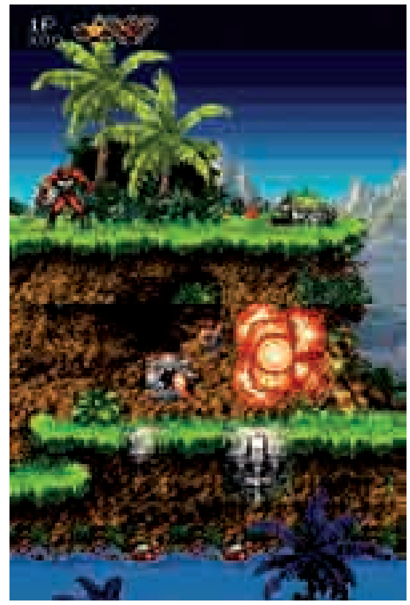
When starting out in videogame journalism you'll find yourself writing reviews of games that few people would bother to read let alone play… titles aimed at the kiddies, movie licences for shoddy films and all-and-any baseball game that somehow still finds a release.

Developer WayForward appears to have paid its debt to the industry, having developed such watery titles as *Shrek: Ogres And Dronkeys* and *The Scorpion King: Sword Of Osiris*, and now has the chance to flex its development muscles with arguably the most testosterone-fuelled game ever created. I suspect that WayForward is a team made up completely of *Contra* fans, a troupe that play the games to death, and, I suspect, pant-wetted and hyperventilated when Konami handed it the reins of arguably one of its most prolific IPs.

Okay, I'm just going to come out and say it, but before I do, I just want to first say this: I'm a massive *Contra III* fan. It



» That giant missile in the background is about to take off… with you on it of course.

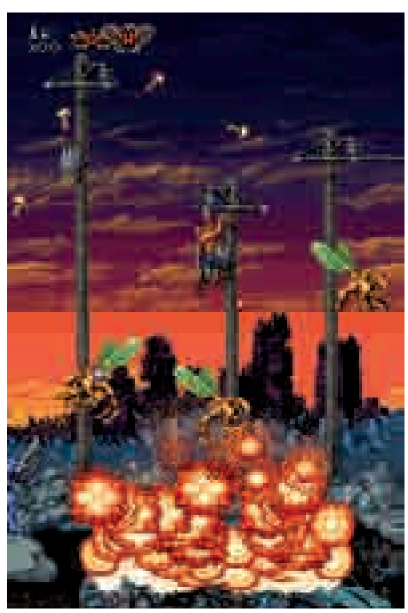


» This is the first level in what is an incredibly impressive homage to the original.

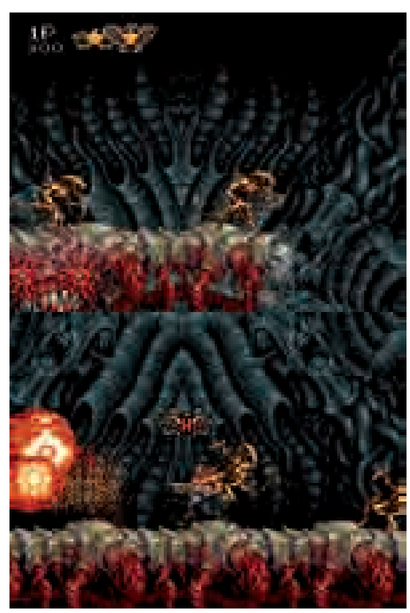
was the first game that I circled to write about when Darran and I split the duties of writing our top 25 run-'n'-gun list, and I stand by my words when I say that it can be seen as one of the finest blueprints of how to get every aspect of the run-'n'-gun genre right.

Contra 4 is a game that I will perch protectively on a pedestal right beside that game. Ask me what my favourite *Contra* is on a Thursday morning and I might say *Contra III*, ask me on a Friday afternoon and there's a possibility I'll turn around, and, in all seriousness, coyly say *Contra 4*.

Contra 4 is fantastic for three reasons: two of these come from development intent, while the other is by hardware default. The game begins with a great reworking of the original's iconic first level, which finds you taking out that well-blasted alien installation blockade (but with an interesting twist) and then you get to play a re-boot of the original's second level but with a neat *Alien 3* section taped on



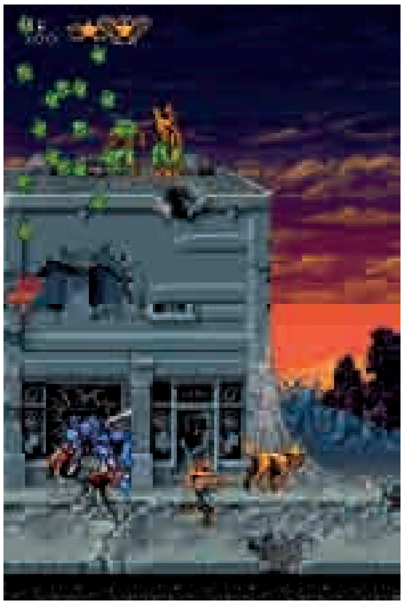
» It feels like we're in Super Nintendo territory now.



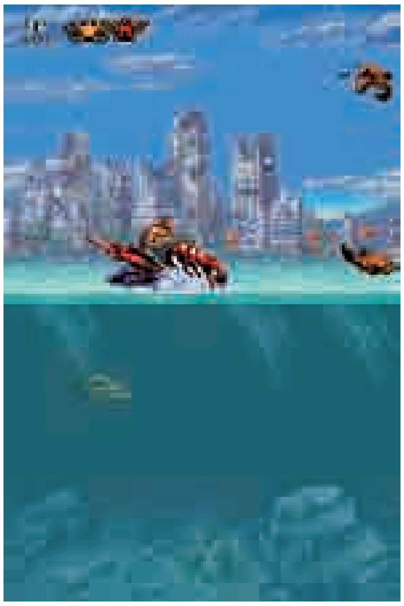
» We wonder where they got the inspiration for the those aliens.



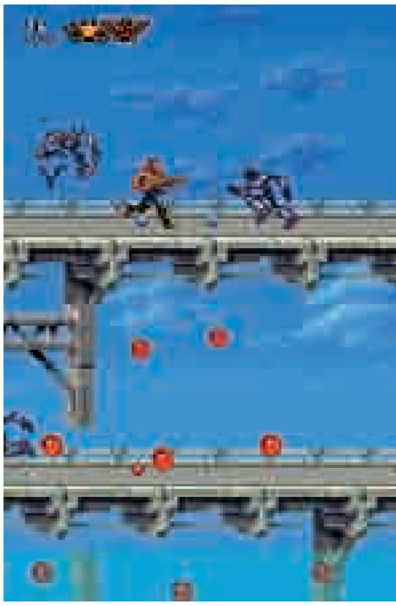
» The jet bikes from *Contra III* make a welcome return, but now they're able to fly across water.



» Look, it's a dog from *Contra III*. This is just one of the many touches that have been included for fans of the series.



» You can't see it now, but there's a gigantic boss off screen that's impatiently waiting to swallow you whole.



» Many reviewers moaned and said that the two screens makes *Contra 4* far too difficult. Big girl's blouses.

at the very start. The rest of the action then segues into *Contra 3* territory. Its levels move away from frenetic platform-hopping, villain-loaded screens and into the staggering set pieces and gargantuan bullet-spewing bosses that the SNES iteration became synonymous with.

Now I've heard many people sternly spit vitriol about the fact that *Contra 4's* chaotic action is split over two screens, but personally I feel it's the one aspect that pushes *Contra* into new gameplay territories. Sure enemy bullets are hidden from view for a few milliseconds, while they travel from one screen into the next, but so what? Just because it forces you to rethink the way you play the game and keep a tentative eye over two screens at once, is that something to really shy away from? It adds a great dynamic to the action, one that's bolstered by the game's new grappling hook attachment which begs to be utilised more in the game.

The game boasts one of the tightest difficulty curves this side of *Contra III*. *Hard Corps* fanatics will struggle to finish its second stage using their first few start-button clicks, but they will soon acclimatise to its difficulty curve. You'll edge slowly closer to another of its wonderfully vibrant and snaking stages and you won't be peeved because you've fallen at another alien hurdle, you'll just take what you've learned about the stage and use it to eke out a few extra yards next time in.

The redrawn sprites look staggering and the later bosses are simply jaw-dropping. WayForward really does supplant you back to a time when we were all rubbing our eyes in astonishment by the lucid likes of *Gunstar Heroes* and *Dynamite Headdy*, times when sublime, character-packed graphics, eye-bleeding colours and snaking levels never once seemed to snipe at a game's pace.

The nine levels on offer (seven if you're a wimp and select Easy) are truly exhausting; with wonderful little nods, visually and musically, to the previous games in the series, and in that way the game almost feels like a surreal anthology of games meshed into one. It's an action-packed mark of deference by a developer who appears to have the tenacity to handle such a lucrative and fan-loyal franchise and deliver in every single way.

Bolstering an already fantastic standalone game is the motivation to complete the game's Challenge mode to unlock some great little Easter eggs that really adds to *Contra 4's* longevity. In the game you will find a fantastic Museum mode, which displays a timeline and screen grabs for all the games in the series, comic books, unlockable characters (including the Probotector bots) and even NES versions (although there's sadly no two-player support on offer here) of both *Contra* and *Super C*, and that's just a few of the extras that are on offer.

Simply put, *Contra 4* is a tour de force of videogames in the best possible sense of the word. It's a truly fitting tribute to the game's 20th year anniversary. Many will dispute that it's not really offering us anything the series hasn't served up before, but how then does it succeed in exposing staleness in run-'n'-gunners of late? Seriously, if you're any kind of *Contra* fan, you owe it to yourself to snap this up as soon as it hits the shelves.

IN SUMMARY

My only real concern is that I've talked this game up so much that some of you will no doubt be expecting euphoric levels of greatness from it, expecting something equally as impressive as *Contra III*, and for many, I suspect this game probably won't even come close. But I'm genuinely having the same fun with this game as I had while playing *Contra 3* on my SNES, and to me this just plays out a little more like the original.



OPINION

When I first played *Contra 4* I was convinced that it was something very special. Now that I've spent the last few weeks playing it, I'm pretty sure that it's become my favourite game in the franchise – a stellar achievement when you consider the awesomeness of *Contra III*. *Contra 4* is, in many ways, a love letter to both the series and fans in general. While it's just as frustratingly hard as virtually every other game in the canon, it's been put together with such surehandedness that you're left in little doubt that WayForward is a huge fan of the franchise. This is quite possibly the best *Contra* game yet made.

Darran Jones

THE SCORES

Presentation **92%**

Redrawn sprites and remixed versions of the *Contra* and *Contra III* tunes accompany this remarkable new addition to the series.

Aesthetics **92%**

It drips nostalgia everywhere and has truly set the bar for run-'n'-gunners on the run.

Playability **93%**

A joy that is never frustrating, always exciting and as hard as nails.

Longevity **88%**

True *Contra*-hounds will only put it down after they've beaten it on the hardest setting. For that reason, it will quite probably last for aeons.

Value for Money **89%**

An essential DS purchase, and for those without a DS it makes for an essential excuse to purchase a DS.

OVERALL SCORE **92%**

RETRORATED

REVIEW

BOULDER DASH: ROCKS!

WE ROCK AND ROLL BACK IN TIME WITH ROCKFORD ON DS



- » **SYSTEM:** DS
- » **PRICE:** £24.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** 10TACLE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



'Old-skool' is the best way to describe *Boulder Dash: Rocks!*, and that would be old-skool with a 'k', not a 'ch', because this new iteration is trying hard to turn the well-loved C64 classic into a something more hip in the eyes of young gamers.

According to the manual, Rockford™ is on a mission to claim the most beautiful crystal in the entire galaxy to win the love of possible girlfriend Crystal™. These two trademarked individuals are the basis for a 25-year resurgence in the franchise. There's always a threat for the suitor to be found somewhere in lovelorn narratives: a menace that looks physically poles apart from the female love subject. And 10tacle Studios has opted for a freaky multi-eyed octopus called Tentacle who has set his many retinas on Crystal whom he hopes to taint with his octopus ink.

The essence of the original game remains. You still have to dig through the levels to collect shiny valuables, and avoid a flattening by heavy boulders, and also, like the original, the game likes to throw in all manner of evil ground-dwellers to walk back and forth repeatedly in a bid to end Rockford through the power of contact.

Boulder Dash: Rocks! offers a neat tweak on the original, that's very easy to grasp and even more annoying to put down. The game's a lesson in trial-and-error as you test one method of gem reclamation before you either land between a rock and a hard place or collect enough to unlock the exit.

The first few stages feel typically '*Boulder Dash*', but before long new gameplay features are added. These are sometimes subtle, like sticks of dynamite which will alight when Rockford runs over them, while others shift the feel of the gameplay. The addition of raygun, which Rockford can use to either obliterate boulders or draw them toward him, are introduced about halfway into the first world. They give Rockford more control over his playfield and allow him to blast enemies, which, dare we say it, kind of pushes the game into slightly more *Bomberman* realms. It's a risky direction to take the franchise but this peculiar merging of the two puzzle games seems to have been handled carefully, and actually works well, creating an altogether unique *Boulder Dash* experience.





OPINION

I really wasn't expecting much from Boulder Dash Rocks!. It has an exclamation mark in the title, Rockford has turned an alarming shade of blue and the large play fields mean it's sometimes tricky to work out where you're supposed to go. Nevertheless I really enjoyed Rocks!, and while it lacks the sheer class and inventiveness of Contra 4, it's a perfectly acceptable update that should win Rockford plenty of new fans. The old-skool gameplay may annoy some but hey, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Darran Jones





» The levels look lush and colorful – a slight departure from the brown-drenched C64 version.

IN SUMMARY

A few tweaks to the gameplay, thankfully introduced gradually, make for an all-new enjoyable adventure for the boy Rockford, that will probably find an appeal across all ages.

RATING **80%**

THE SCORES

Presentation **75%**

It's not really anything to get over excited about to be honest.

Aesthetics **89%**

The bright visuals and chirpy sounds have an old-school SNES vibe about them.

Playability **85%**

This is where the game excels. It's a great game to fill in a few spare minutes.

Longevity **79%**

With only four worlds, it's not going to take long to finish at all.

Value for Money **68%**

If you're looking for an enchanting puzzler for your DS, here it is.

Overall **80%**

KONAMI ARCADE CLASSICS

A CLASSIC COMPILATION



- » **SYSTEM:** DS
- » **PRICE:** £19.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **PLAYERS:** 1 -2



Konami, can hold its head extremely high this issue. Not only has it wowed us with a staggering new Contra game, but it has also created one of the most comprehensive compilation packs we've ever come across. Namely Konami Arcade Classics.

I guess it'll be a good idea to start by giving a run down of all the games that come crammed with this pack. You get 15 in total, a line-up consisting of *Contra*, *Scramble*, *Tutankham*, *Pooyan*, *Time Pilot*, *Rock 'N Rope*, *International Tack & Field* (or *Track & International Field* as its logo would have you believe), *Circus Charlie*, *Super Basketball*, *Road Fighter*, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, *TwinBee*, *Kicker*, *Gradius* and *Rush 'N Attack*.

Now, I'm sure many of you will be able to ascertain which of these titles are duds and which are studs. I'm easily pleased so the only titles you might like to avoid are *Rock 'N Rope* and *Tutankham*. Despite feeling somewhat unbalanced in terms of the general quality of the games – containing a few sport titles, a top-down racer, a couple of run-and-gunners and even a circus simulator – what the pack certainly doesn't lack is variety.

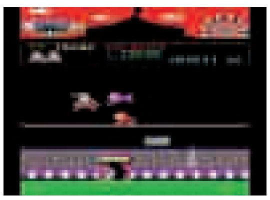
What is most impressive about *Konami Arcade Classics* is the level of care and attention to detail that the company seems to have put into creating the back end of the pack. Using the stylus wand, you can view the game's Japanese and European flyer art, and even take a peek inside the cab's insides.

You also have a neat little jukebox feature, which not only allows you to listen to each of the game's chirpy tunes but also its bleepy sound effects. For many, the most impressive thing about the entire package will be found in the exhausting level of customisation that you can carry out on each title. You can delve into the game's innards and toy around with individual chip settings, allowing you to alter the screen ratio and give you multiple plays.

You can while away the hours chopping and changing the games to suit your individual needs and personal tastes. And when you're bored of doing all that playing and tweaking and your ears have listened to the packed library of hypnotic sounds, you can create a video of your game, send it to your pals and, er, feel like a geek.



» "The time? Sure, hang on a mo. It's quarter past six."



» There's something you don't see every day. A nosey elephant.



» Brains with arms? Freaky stuff.

» They're a bit short of staff at Air Traffic Control by the look of things.



» "Nice work, Oolong. These tiles you've laid look real level."





OPINION

Considering how many games Konami has in its back catalogue, we're somewhat surprised that the company hasn't put a compilation together before now. While you could argue that hits like *Frogger, Hyper Sports* and *Vendetta* are absent because Konami is cynically saving them for future compilations, this is still a very impressive effort that every DS owner should seek out. Sure, the tiny screen makes it occasionally hard to spot bullets, but the sheer attention to detail (you have to love those dip switches) makes it a real winner.

Darran Jones

IN SUMMARY

This is a faultlessly presented title that might have benefited from a few more essential names to raise its game a shade. *Konami Arcade Classics* on Nintendo DS is still a great buy that will offer endless hours of play.

THE SCORES

Presentation **95%**

Infallible.

Aesthetics **85%**

It is dripping with arcade nostalgia.

Playability **79%**

Varied. Some games are a tad samey, but you'll find a few you'll continually return to.

Longevity **89%**

Longevity won't necessarily come from the games, but more from the customising, we've no issue with that, mind.

Value for Money **88%**

A staggering showpiece, offering an instant library of classic retro games.

Overall **88%**

HOMEBREW RATED

WE FIND OUT EXACTLY WHAT AYE CARAMBA MEANS AND DO A LITTLE BIT OF OUT THE BOX EXPLORING

AYE CARAMBA

SAYS IT ALL REALLY!



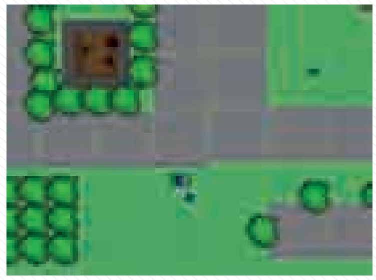
» What a horrible place to live, a dank dystopian future habituated by grudge-bearing motors… at least the sun's out.

FORMAT: PC WINDOWS
DEVELOPED BY: DAVID JOSEPH
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
LINK: WWW. GREATGAMESEXPERIMENT.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

The word 'caramba' is the Spanish exclamation of astonishment, dismay, or anger, and I honestly couldn't think up a more apt title for this game. *Aye Caramba* is, without doubt, the most perplexing homebrew game I've ever played.

It has so many head-scratching parts that I really don't know where to begin. I guess the story would be a good place to start, which seems to have been plucked out of thin air, dipped in ludicrous, washed with random and then hung out to dry in a place called Make Believe. After the world's machines mysteriously turn on humanity and yield an automotive revolution, the fate of mankind falls to you – a choice of three camper vans who are seemingly immune to the corruption.

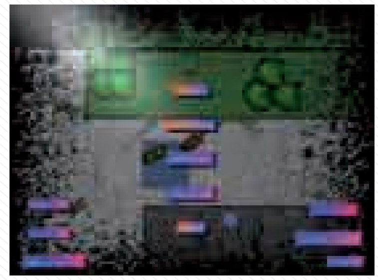
Before you begin playing *Aye Caramba* the game tells you there are a few things you need to know. What are these important titbits of information? One is that the game is quest based (despite the game blatantly not being anything of the sort… unless 'quest based' means to drive around shooting cars until there's nothing left). And it also clears up that its story – four sentences which you've already read once – can be seen by clicking on the game's story button. And here's us thinking you had to access it by scratching your monitor with ten pences.



» It looks a little bit like *Micro Machines*, but believe us when we say it isn't anywhere near as good.

This game is split into three sections, none of which appear to be finished. But if you want to experience the most bemusing experience of your entire life, push aside *Aye Caramba*'s Quest mode and two-player Battle mode and opt to play the section called Tower Defense. From what I can attain it involves destroying hundreds of vans that jitter around the screen like drug addicts before they reach a house.

Despite my harsh take on this review, I honestly believe the entire world should play this; I want *Aye Caramaba* to gain cult homebrew status. I want T-shirts and online communities to really get behind this game because sometimes something can be so strange it's flipping awesome.



» You see the 'Game Story' button? That's where you go for the game story, and the 'Start' button… ah, you get the gist.

PRESENTATION: 88% Clearly all of the time has gone into the look of the game.
AESTHETICS: 40% Too bright and candy to be a game about revolting cars.
PLAYABILITY: 30% Think the Turtle Wagon sections in the *Turtle*'s game, but worse.
LONGEVITY: 100% It would take you seven lifetimes to work out what exactly you're supposed to do.
VALUE FOR MONEY: 35% It's free, but could we still recommend it… not really!
OVERALL: 45%

MONDO MEDICALS

MAKES FINDING THE CURE FOR CANCER FUN

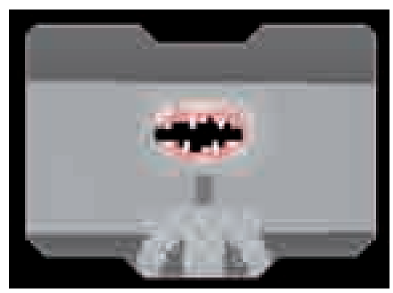
It's been out for a while now, but this brilliantly atmospheric virtual rat maze for super sharp rodents was just too weird not to get a feature inside the mag.

This strange game starts by introducing you to a gangly looking being that who's a cross between Max Headroom and Marilyn Manson. This waif-like entity welcomes you to Mondo Medical: a medical testing centre that needs your help to find the cure for cancer.

The game then plonks you into a number of grey 3D mazes, and it's your job to simply locate the exit with the help of a cryptic instruction. For instance, you might be asked to follow the arrows to reach your exit, but that doesn't necessarily mean following them in the direction that they're facing.

The game is basically a test to see how apt you are at thinking outside of the box, which is all well and good, but some of the latter puzzles seem to actually require getting out of the box, jumping into a rocket ship and travelling to an interstellar world before putting your thinking cap on. I only got to about test six before my brain curled up in the foetal position and my eyes fell out. Poor Darran had to coax it back to normality with the ICO soundtrack.

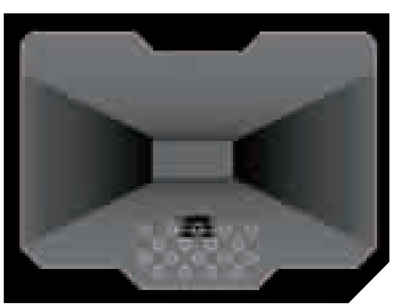
This is a very promising game from coder Cactus, and it shows some real originality. If you're looking for a particularly peculiar method of brain training, which is a billion miles away from the colourfully touchy examinations performed by Dr Kawashima, then this homebrew effort is sure to offer you an extensive workout.



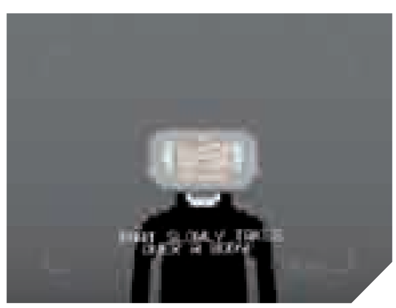
» "Feed me, Seymour!"



FORMAT: PC WINDOWS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
DEVELOPED BY: CACTUS
LINK: WWW. GREATGAMESEXPERIMENT.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT



» This is the gameplay; grey, foreboding and head scratching.



» This strange-looking guy will be telling you what to do.

PRESENTATION: 79% Well presented, and eerily invoking.
AESTHETICS: 88% There are some genuinely atmospheric parts to this simplistic little puzzler.
PLAYABILITY: 75% The levels do start to get a shade repetitive and the grey look doesn't motivate you to stick them out.
LONGEVITY: 90% Some real brain teasers here, depending on your IQ, it could probably last some people a lifetime.
VALUE FOR MONEY: 85% It's free, and certainly worth experiencing.
OVERALL: 80%

TWANG, A GAME THAT MAKES US LOVE, RATHER THAN DESPISE, RUBBER-BAND PHYSICS

TWANG

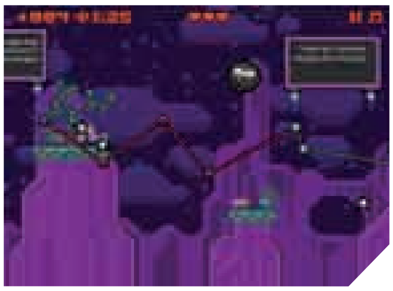
RUBBER BALL BOUNDING BACK TO ME

FORMAT: PC WINDOWS
DEVELOPED: NITROME
LINK: WWW.NITROME.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT



Rubber-band physics really get my goat. In fact, if I'm reviewing a game that includes such a lazy and frustrating method of enemy difficulty I will immediately knock 80% off its final score. I would have happily awarded *Mario Kart 64* 11% had I been reviewing games back in the Nineties.

However, there exists one game on this planet that actually uses rubber-band physics for the good of mankind, one that even polarises itself around that very physic and yet somehow doesn't play like a rugby team repeatedly toe-punting you in the teeth.



» If you're a perfectionist you'll want to snap up all those stars.

Twang is a quirky little puzzle game from the fertile mind of Nitrome, and like all great puzzlers, it's astonishingly easy to grasp: get a ball with a face on it from point A to point B by twanging it with elastic bands before you run out of time.

The elastic bands form sections of the levels, and by pulling back on their smiley nodes with the mouse you can slingshot your ball forwards to its destination.

There are some sections of the levels that you can't manipulate, and gaps in the stages that will spell doom to your bounding avatar. Differing coloured sections will react in different ways to a pull. Blue sections, for instance, will always move in a uniformed manner, so the real knack is to learn how each colour reacts to manipulation. There are also stars that can be collected in each level, which adds a sense of replay to the game.

The only niggling issue that arose from the game is that the majority of your screen is out of view, so progress will mainly consist of trial and error. However, because of its intuitive mouse controls and colourful presentation we simply haven't been able to put this game down. It's been eating into our lunch breaks like Christmas shopping.

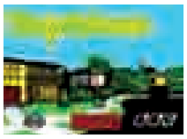


» Watch out for the enemies, they'll knock your teeth out. And when you're toothless it's game over.

PRESENTATION: 85% Well presented, colourful bold graphics, top draw.
AESTHETICS: 85% Has a real strong Amiga feel to it.
PLAYABILITY: 85% Really easy to pick up, an enjoyable little puzzler
LONGEVITY: 89% A lot of replay potential with the star-grabbing.
VALUE FOR MONEY: 86% It's free, definitely.
OVERALL: 85%

NEIGHBOURS

YOU SING IT, I'LL HUM IT



- » **PUBLISHER:** IMPULZE
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **GENRE:** RACING
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



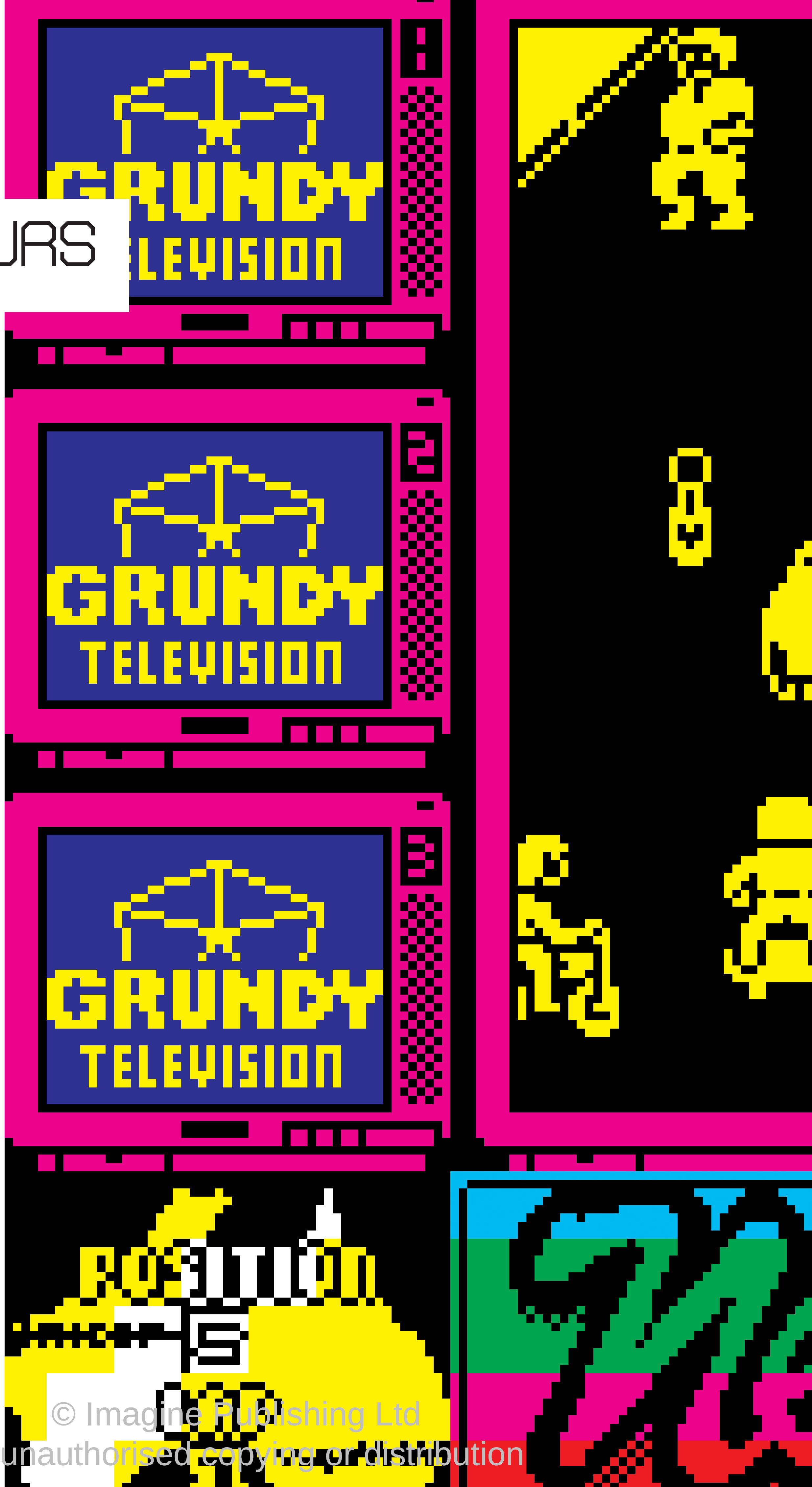
HISTORY

Here's a nice little irony for you. When *Neighbours* was first released on the ZX Spectrum for a staggeringly high £10.99 (£15.99 on disk), lead character Scott Robinson had long since left the show. The absence of the game's leading star from the hit TV soap didn't stop some reviewers though, with one publication giving it a ridiculously high score of 81% (admittedly though, this was for the budget re-release).

While *Neighbours* is by no means a complete catastrophe, we're baffled as to how it could have received such a high score, as it's one of the most average racers around. That's right, instead of perhaps basing the game on *Paperboy* or maybe turning it into a *Duck Hunt* clone (there's extra points for shooting Kerry Mangle), we instead ended up with a dull racer that required you to race around Ramsay Street as quickly as possible.

Of course this is far from easy, and as well as having to deal with interfering busybodies like Mrs Mangle, you'll also be racing against Mike Young, Harold Bishop and other Ramsay Street regulars (who had all left the show by the time of the game's budget re-release). Should you successfully complete the race you had the chance to race around three other locations from the show, but honestly. Why actually bother?

With a gradually decreasing energy bar that could be replenished by running over sweets and other goodies, fiddly controls and unfair AI, *Neighbours* proved to be a dreadfully poor licence that hasn't aged at all well. In fact, if it wasn't for the huge logo at the bottom of the screen – which also doubled as the aforementioned energy bar – and the blatantly obvious references to Grundy TV that were plastered down the left-hand side of the screen, this could have been absolutely anything. Everybody may well need good neighbours, but we'd be happy to just settle for good games. Sadly, this sorry effort isn't one of them.





BARGAIN HUNT

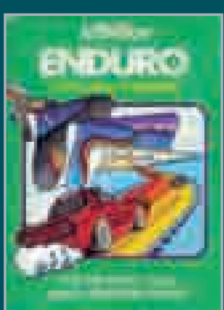
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over a hundred different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it.

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. As you may have noticed, we've changed the theme recently and are looking at specific categories. This month Atari 2600 titles

ENDURO
Atari 2600
Normally sells for £5
Ended at £1.57



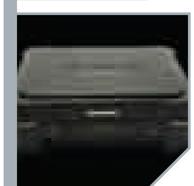
KUNG FU MASTER
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£17.38**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**

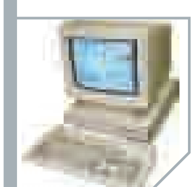


PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released.
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

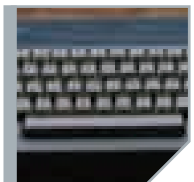
ACORN



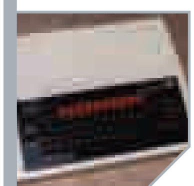
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) with games**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor.



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($165+)**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- GET DEXTER
- XOR
- SORCERY +



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE

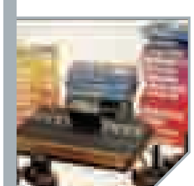


APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) with games**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



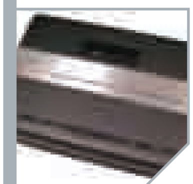
2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

👾👾👾👾👾 ROCKING HORSE SHIT
👾👾👾👾 HEN'S TEETH
👾👾👾 LUCKY FIND
👾👾 EBAY REGULAR
👾 CAR-BOOT SALE BARGAIN



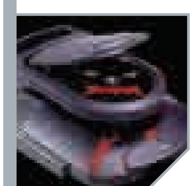
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY 👾
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

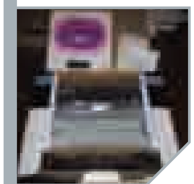


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY 👾
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) prices fluctuate wildly**
Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



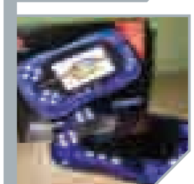
PIPPIN (ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA 500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY 👾
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) more with games, depending on model**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



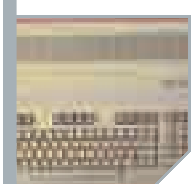
C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY 👾👾👾
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY 👾
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the bestselling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND

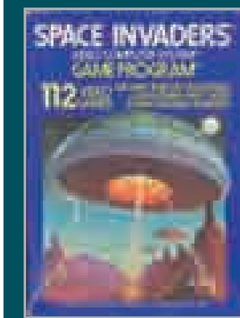


C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY 👾👾👾
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

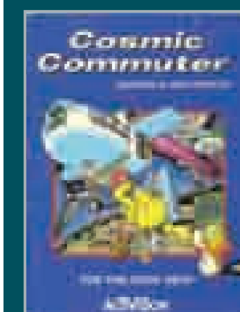


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

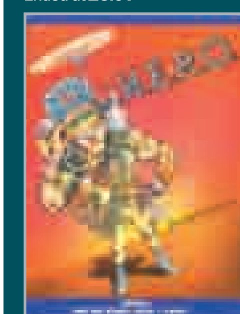
SPACE INVADERS
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£2**
Ended at **No Sale**



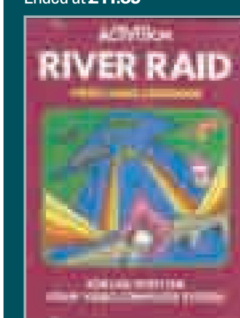
COSMIC COMMUTER
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£50**
Ended at **£61.25**



HERO
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£8.01**



RIVER RAID
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£11.89**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**
The computer that established the Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**
Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



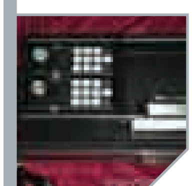
BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
- RATATOUILLE - BLU-RAY
- THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM - HD DVD
- KNOCKED UP - HD DVD



CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
More insanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio had hoped it would do better than its PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) from the USA**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**
Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) very cheap on eBay**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Failed console by Emerson that had numerous different clones released, as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act. Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**
After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) allegedly for a mint system**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



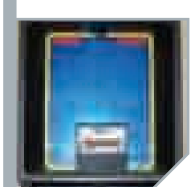
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE

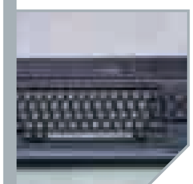


X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

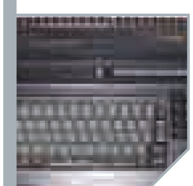
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER



MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

NEC



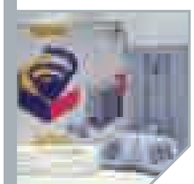
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) massive fluctuations**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- PC KID
- OUTRUN



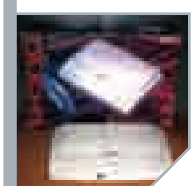
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) prices can fluctuate**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PC-E and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PC-E DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PC-E/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PC-E Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!

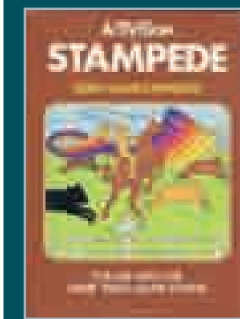


FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.

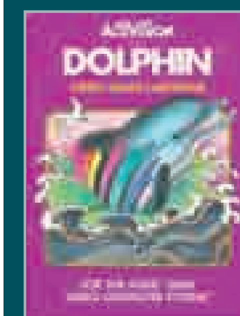


FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

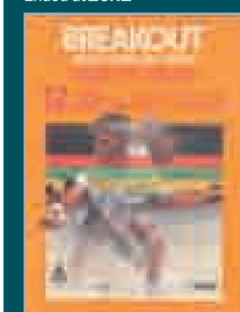
STAMPEDE
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£3**
Ended at **No Sale**



DOLPHIN
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£15.56**

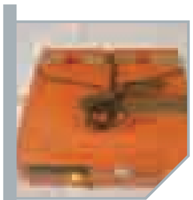


BREAKOUT
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£2**
Ended at **£6.12**



SPACE SHUTTLE
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£17.67**





SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



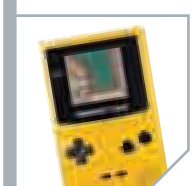
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yokoi.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



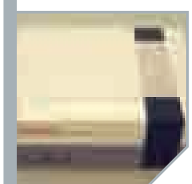
GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



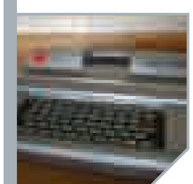
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) more with DVC**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



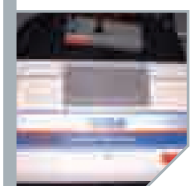
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



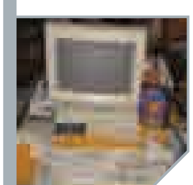
SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history. The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



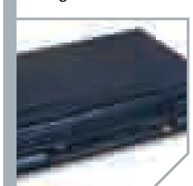
SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) according to eBay**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad

hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**

The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.



GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**

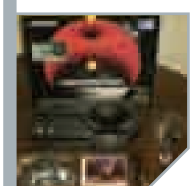
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**

Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**

A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**

Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) more with games**

Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.

- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK

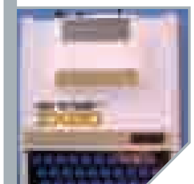


SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.

- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SINCLAIR



ZX80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) apparently if boxed and mint**

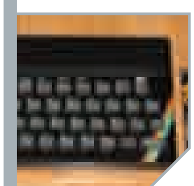
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**

Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**

The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEO-GEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**

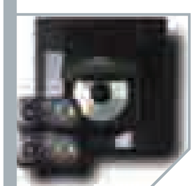
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEO-GEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) multi-slot systems cost more**

High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)

- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR



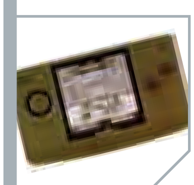
NEO-GEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEO-GEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**

CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG



NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**

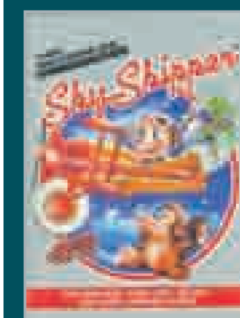
Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

FOOTBALL
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **No Sale**



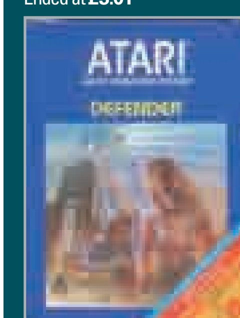
SKY SKIPPER
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£21.54**



JOUST
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£7**
Ended at **£3.56**



DEFENDER
Atari 2600
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£3.01**



RETRO DIRECTORY

EVERY MONTH RETRO GAMER WILL BE LISTING ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES AND INTERVIEWING SOME OF THEIR KEY MEMBERS. THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO SHAUN MCCLESKEY ABOUT HIS EXCELLENT NEO-GEO RESOURCE SITE, NEO-GEO.COM

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

ATARI AGE
www.atariage.com
Excellent resource site that's dedicated to all aspects of Atari gaming.

ATARI ORG
www.atari.org
Another superb Atari site that covers every single machine from the 2600 to arcade classics.

AUSSIE ARCADE
www.aussiearcade.com.au
A fantastic arcade forum that caters for an Australian audience. There's plenty of great topics to participate in and some very knowledgable members.

LEMON64
www.lemon64.com
Superb Commodore 64 site filled with insightful reviews, an excellent and friendly forum and lots of pretty screenshots.

LEMON AMIGA
www.lemonamiga.com
Brilliant Amiga website run by Kim Lemon, the owner of the excellent Lemon 64.

NTSC-UK
http://ntsc-uk.domino.org
Largely dedicated to the latest import games, but there is a very informative retro section that offers useful advice on collecting rare imports.

OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
http://old-computers.com
If you thought the Atari 2600 was ancient then you may want to visit this fascinating website. Expect a feature on obscure computers very, very soon.

RACKET BOY
http://racketboy.com
There's a definite Sega slant to Racket Boy, but don't let that put you off visiting, as it's a lot of fun and boasts a rather bubbly forum.

RADIO SEGA
www.radiosega.net/
If you're a fan of Sega music you're going to love Radio Sega, as there are tonnes of fantastic Sega tunes to listen to.



Retro Gamer - When did you set Neo-Geo.com up?
Shawn McCleskey - I was already active in the early Neo scene, which previously existed at a Yahoo club known as DolphinLord's Neo-Geo Domain. Around mid 1999 I created a personal website sharing my hobbies and interests with heavy emphasis on the Neo and then an opportunity to acquire the domain name 'Neo-Geo.com' presented itself for a bargain $500 (ironically, this is the exact amount I paid for my Euro copy of *Kizuna Encounter* from a collector in France). It was simply a parked domain name lacking any website development, but it was certainly a gem with plenty of potential to build upon.

My personal fan site began evolving into Neo-Geo.com in late 1999, immediately following the domain name acquisition. Around this time, SNK was busy releasing *Warriors Rage 2* for the PSX, *Card Fighter's Clash* was just released, the Neo-Geo Pocket Color was starting to get exciting, and everyone was talking about *Mark Of The Wolves* and slowdown issues in *Metal Slug 2*. I set up some forums (originally on UBB: Ultimate Bulletin Board), some key community members were willing to lend a helping hand (most of which still remain involved to this very day), and people began migrating in. It's been busy ever since, and the community has survived the actual system.

RG - Why choose to base it on the Neo-Geo?
SM - It was the most glamorous system at the time: own your own home arcade system, no need for 'arcade perfect' questions, it is the arcade system. The Neo-Geo offers one of the most rewarding and yet most challenging gaming library to collect due to the smaller print runs and limited availability in home cartridge format. Plus, it's always had a solid core of unique and interesting die-hard fans.

RG - What gives Neo-Geo.com the edge over similar websites?
SM - It is blessed with an intelligent and informed user base that really loves the system, and gaming in general. We also offer a market section where members can buy and sell their Neo gear, complete with a feedback rating system, and totally free of any fees or commissions. Not to mention comprehensive price guides to assist one in buying and selling decisions.

RG - Why does the site remain so popular?
SM - The motto is 'come for the games, stay for the drama'. The site goes beyond just games and has become a full-fledged community where people become friends, threaten to buy plane tickets just to go beat someone up across three time zones, and sometimes even meet up for gaming. In fact, people have met up on four different continents through our site. As a community, we have chosen to transcend gaming to offer much more, thus giving our site a lasting appeal.

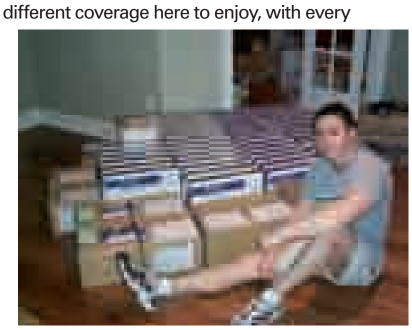
RG - What's the most popular part of the website?
SM - The forums are the most popular section because this is where our members can actively participate. It is the knowledge banks such as tech help, game play, news and rumours, and others, which often led newcomers to the site in the first place.

RG - How can our readers contribute to the site?
SM - Come on by, consider becoming part of the community and share their knowledge. It's a lively crowd and the forums offer one of the freest places for expressing different views on a variety of subjects. You may experience some mild to moderate hazing as part of our initiation process, but it's all good fun. We are also developing a Wiki section so already existing forum members can

THE MEAN MACHINES ARCHIVE DEEPER LOOK

Neo-Geo.com
www.neo-geo.com

If you're a fan of SNK then there's only one place you should really bother visiting. Although widely dedicated to SNK's wondrous AES and MVS systems, there is plenty of different coverage here to enjoy, with every SNK system being covered to some degree. Often used by collectors , Neo-Geo's passionate followers are sometimes seen as a little elitist, but this couldn't be further from the truth. We've required assistance on several occasions for a number of different things, and we've always had efficient help from a variety of different members. Special mention must go to Rot, who was kind enough to sort us out with a very reasonably priced AES as well as quite a few games. There's also a great trade and buy forum, so if you're looking to get into SNK gaming, this should be your first port of call. Here's founder Shawn, while his forum avatar (so you know how to find him online) can be found at the top of the page.



THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

RETRO GAMING RADIO
www.monroeworld.com
Superb monthly podcast that gives an exhaustive look at the US game's market courtesy of Shane Monroe.

RLLMUK FORUM
www.rllmukforum.com/index.php
While it features the latest games, there's a dedicated retro section that's filled with plenty of informative members. The Pickford brothers are also moderators there.

SHOOT THE CORE
http://shootthecore.moonpod.com
Excellent site that loves shmups of all descriptions. There are plenty of homebrew efforts to download here as well, so you'll never be short of something to blast.

SYSTEM16
www.system16.com
While there's plenty of Sega love here, System16 is also dedicated to covering as many different arcade games as possible.

VIDEOGAME MUSEUM
www.vgmuseum.com
This great site has pretty much everything. Screenshots, game endings, cover scans, reviews. It's all here and all good.

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
www.vc-reviews.com
Run by **Retro Gamer**'s very own Damien McFerran, this is your definitive reference point for anything Virtual Console related.

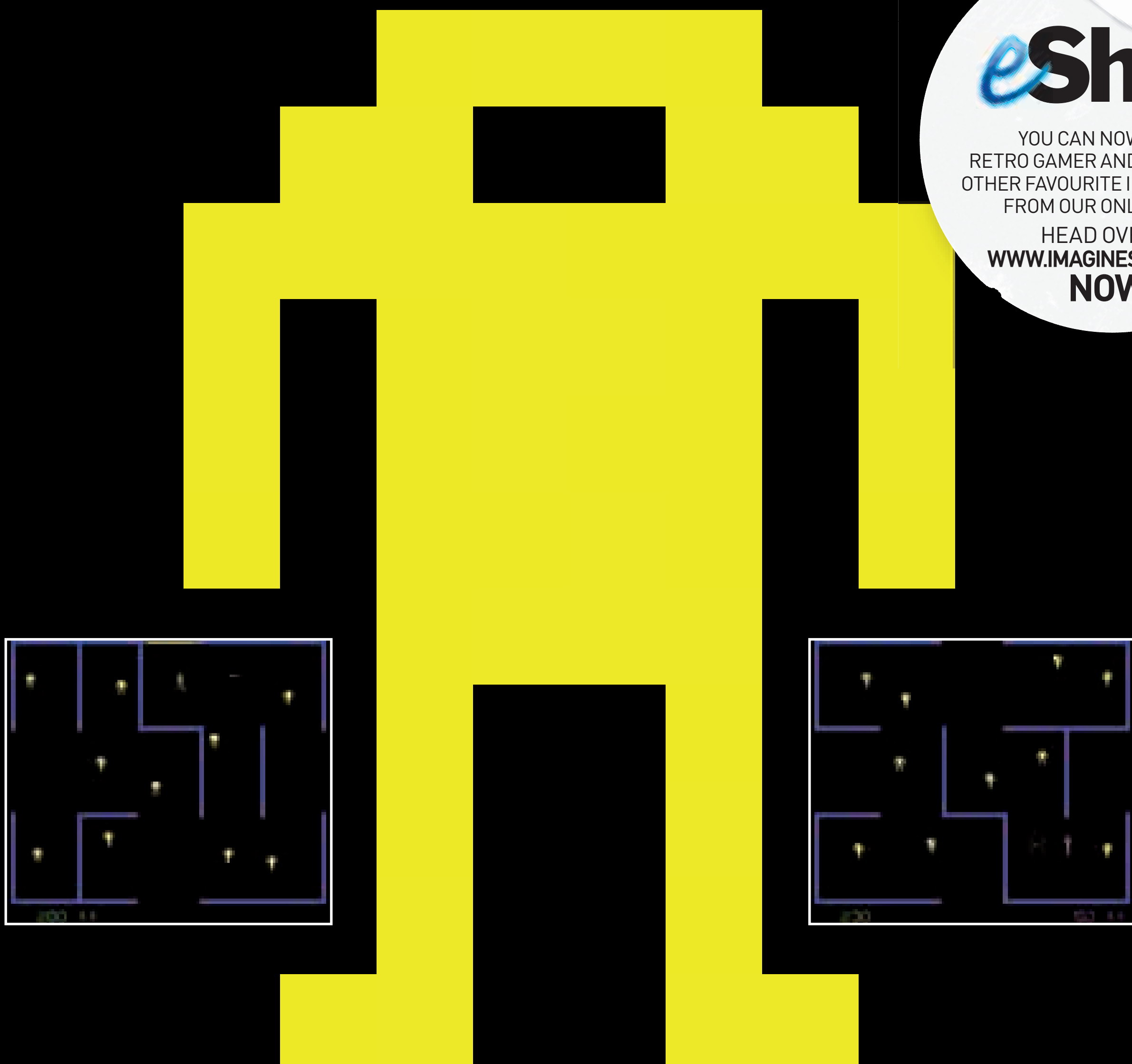
WORLD OF SPECTRUM
www.worldofspectrum.org
Superb Spectrum site that offers a friendly forum and plenty of legal Java-based Spectrum games to enjoy.

If you want to add your website to our expanding directory please contact Darran at darran.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk

INTRUDER ALERT! INTRUDER ALERT!

THE MAKING OF…

BERZERK STERN'S 1980 SHOOTER NOT ONLY BROUGHT A REFRESHING SPIN TO THE POPULAR MAZE GAMES OF THE TIME, IT ALSO WENT ON TO INSPIRE THE MIGHTY ROBOTRON: 2084. CREATOR ALAN MCNEIL EXPLAINS HOW IT ALL BEGAN.



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OTHER EXCITING DIRECTIVES…

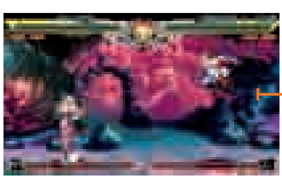
- Climb aboard your flying rug, take to the skies and discover how Bullfrog created the soaring success that was the magnificent Magic Carpet
- Stuart Campbell moves his attention away from pinball tables, and uncovers some of the many fruit machines that were based on classic arcade games
- He's created some of the most intelligent games of all time but what really makes Will Wright tick? Only **Retro Gamer** has the answers

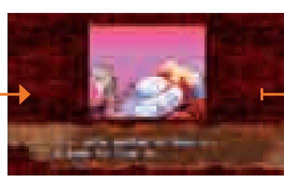
END/GAME

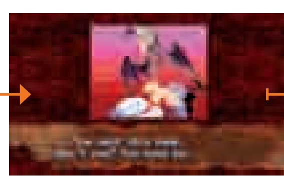


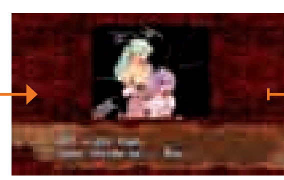
VAMPIRE SAVIOR:

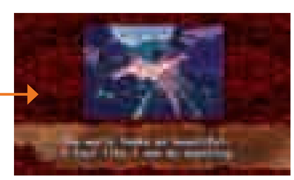
There are 15 different endings for Capcom's third Darkstalker's outing but this is arguably our favourite. Can you guess why?











SCREEN 1
Morrigan and her 'sort of' sister (it's complicated) Lilith face off Succubus to Succubus. While the cheerful Lilith tries her best she's no match for her stronger 'sort of' sibling (it's complicated) and falls, defeated, to the floor.

SCREEN 2
As Lilith lies slumped on the cold hard ground she tells Morrigan that she only wanted a body to live in. Some will argue that her vampish figure is fine as it is, but we guess it's the equivalent of saying "Does my bum look big in this?"

SCREEN 3
Morrigan suddenly begins to twig that this 'sort of' sister (it's complicated) needs her to survive and goads the fallen Succubus with, "You want this body, don't you? You need me…" Shakespeare this certainly ain't.

SCREEN 4
In one of the most surreal scenes we've ever seen in a beat-'em-up, Morrigan holds her defeated foe to her more-than-ample bitties and begins to absorb her. Fans around the world wonder why it hasn't been made into a movie yet.

SCREEN 5
The final scene and a reborn Morrigan/Lilith is finally able to see the world through brand new eyes. Morrigan's happy, Lilith's happy and sweaty gamers the world over are happy too. Everybody wins.